

**PICTURING PEASANTS:
MAKSIMILIJAN VANKA'S FOLKLORIC PAINTINGS AND THE "CROATIAN
QUESTION" FROM HABSBURG EMPIRE TO CROATIAN NATION-STATE**

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This dissertation examines how early twentieth-century images and displays of Croatian folk culture were used to imagine a variety of competing and mutable Central European identities. In recent decades, early twentieth-century depictions of Central and Eastern European folk culture have been used to lend cultural legitimacy to new nation-states, including Croatia. This dissertation seeks to excavate the historical motivation behind and early reception of such depictions of folk culture by analyzing the folkloric works of Croatian painter Maksimiljan Vanka (1889-1963).

Vanka began painting folkloric imagery during the Great War. After his immigration to the United States in 1934, his folkloric work culminated in his murals in St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church in Millvale, Pennsylvania completed on the eve of the US entrance into World War II. During the three decades in which Vanka produced folkloric works, the Yugoslav regions witnessed intense political change: the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the foundation of a unified Yugoslav state, the assassinations of political leaders, the establishment of a royal dictatorship, and the seizure of power by a fascist regime. In the shifting political situation, Vanka was typical of the artists and thinkers of his time in that he produced various and changing responses to the "Croatian question" about the region's national sovereignty. This dissertation charts how Vanka used the image of the Croatian peasant to support

cosmopolitanism in the late Habsburg Empire, Yugoslavism at the end of World War I, both Croatian nationalism and socialism in interwar Zagreb, and transatlantic immigrant identity in the United States.

Vanka's artworks and connections serve as the thread that links together this project's examination of depictions of Croatian folk culture in three specific early twentieth-century Croatian contexts: museums, mass media publications, and modern art. This dissertation explores the transfer of collections of folk culture from museums of applied arts to newly founded ethnographic museums after World War I; the increase in popular images of strong peasants in interwar Zagreb in line with the aims of the Croatian Peasant Party; and the stylistic and political diversity with which modern Croatian artists produced images of folk culture.

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When I entered the University of Pittsburgh's graduate program in the history of art and architecture in fall of 2009, I did not imagine that my research would extend beyond the borders of the German modernism I had indicated in my application. My advisor, Barbara McCloskey, proved to be much more open and forward thinking. It was through her contacts that I began that next summer to catalog work by Croatian-American artist Maksimilijan Vanka at his family estate. That summer, in a hot attic in a rural Pennsylvania farmhouse, I came face to face with a set of bold images of Croatian folk culture that immediately charmed me. I began a journey to discover what these images meant in their original context, and how they had found their way here. Thank you to Barbara McCloskey for setting me on this path, and for many thoughts, comments, and encouragements along the way.

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COMMON ABBREVIATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

- ALU Arhiv za likovne umjetnosti – Archive of Fine Arts, a division of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts
- DAZ Državni arhiv u Zagrebu – State Archives in Zagreb
Etnografski muzej u Zagrebu – Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb
Grupa trojica – Group of Three
- HAZU Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti – Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts
- HNK Hrvatsko narodno kazalište – Croatian National Theater
- HSS Hrvatska seljačka stranka – Croatian Peasant Party
- Kraljevina Jugoslavija – Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929-1941)
- KSHS Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca – Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918-1929)
- MUO Muzej za umjetnost i obrt – Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb
- NDH Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – Independent State of Croatia (1941-1945)
- NSK Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica – National and University Library
Republika Hrvatska – Republic of Croatia (1991-present)
- SFRJ Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija – Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1943-1992)
Umjetnički paviljon – Zagreb Art Pavilion
Viša škola za umjetnost i umjetni obrt u Zagrebu – Zagreb College for Arts and Crafts
(now the Akademija likovnih umjetnosti – Zagreb Academy of Fine Arts)

1.0 THE CROATIAN *NAROD* AND THE WORK OF MAKSIMILJAN VANKA

In Croatia even a foreigner notices at first glance that there are two peoples here: the gentlemen and the common people ...Everyone who wears a black coat has the right to the title of 'gentleman,' and only with this title can one in practice, in life, have any worth as a man. All the others...are 'peasants,' 'thick-headed,' 'cattle,' 'vulgar people,' or simply slaves, subjects. Neither the property, nor the personal honor, nor the individual freedom of any man from among the common people is secure...¹

Stjepan Radić, 1896

Folly wears a top hat on its highly learned head...²

Miroslav Krleža, *On the Edge of Reason*, 1938

In early twentieth century Zagreb, the battles for modernization, globalization, competing identities, and social justice were often visualized as a sartorial battleground. On one end of the dichotomy was the peasant in folk dress, and on the other, the gentleman in suit and top hat. One embodied local tradition and the other cosmopolitan modernity, and yet the two were intrinsically linked. To be modern required national identity, and a national identity in Croatia required folk culture. For Croatians and many other Central and Eastern European peoples, the processes of modernization thus created a vexed relationship with folk culture that has proven to be troublesome from the nineteenth century until the present day. On one hand, folk culture

¹ Quoted and translated in Mark Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, the Croat Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization, 1904-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 62.

² Miroslav Krleža, *On the Edge of Reason* [*Na rubu pameti*], translated by Zora Depolo (1938; repr., New York: New Directions Books, 1989), 14.

(*narodna kultura*) was and is presented as the legitimizing historic foundation on which the modern Croatian nation-state is based. On the other hand, the label of peasant (*seljak*) is used in everyday conversation as an insult denoting a certain tasteless backwardness. A third viewpoint, especially prevalent among early twentieth-century Croatian artists and politicians, saw the peasant as the victim, who was overworked and underpaid by an expanding global economy and whose traditional way of life was being crushed under the wheels of modernity. Paradoxically, folk culture was and is seen as simultaneously intrinsic to, antithetical to, and victim to modernity.

This complex relationship to folk culture is compounded by the Orientalizing stereotypes of the Balkans as a wild, backwards region which lends its name to the process of Balkanization. These stereotypes emerged in the Western press at the turn of the twentieth century, peaked in the Balkan Wars from 1912 to 1913, resurfaced during the wars in the 1990s, and reappear each time a major event happens in the region.³ These Orientalizing understandings of the Balkans as both cultural crossroads and marginalized Europe have been absorbed within the region, creating a deep-rooted anxiety, held often on former peripheries, that others will assume they are backwards, unsophisticated, or crude. The figure of the peasant is a lightning rod for such insecurity.

If I have chosen to shape this entire project about modern art and visual culture around images and displays of folk culture, and those by Maksimilijan Vanka (1889-1963) in particular, it is not because I believe that twentieth-century Croatia was a rural arcadia. Agricultural workers did make up the vast majority of the population until World War II, but even in this region that lacked industry, their lives were shaped by and adapted to many other social,

³ Maria Todorova provides a good discussion of the orientalization of the Balkans. Maria Nikolaeva Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

technological, and cultural markers of alternative experiences of modernity. The contested figure of the peasant has the ability to shine light on the political and social situation of early twentieth-century Croatian regions in the late Habsburg Empire and interwar Yugoslavia. In particular, this figure was called on throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to personify the various stances on the Croatian question about the political sovereignty of the Croatian region. In this role, the figure of the peasant visualized the intersections of tradition and change, and the layering of the local, the national, and the global. At the same time, this project focuses on folk culture without being about folk culture per se. It explores how stereotypes and associations created by the exhibition and depiction of Croatian folk dress were used to express identities as narrow as the local village and as broad as the transatlantic immigrant.

1.1 VANKA AT THE SERVICE OF THE NATION

Since its founding in 1991, the Republic of Croatia has reclaimed eclectic artistic remnants of its complicated past in order to construct a cohesive narrative of its origin. Today's Croatian President conducts her affairs in a mid-century modern 1960s villa built for former Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito and, quite in aesthetic contrast, holds her meetings in a conference room lined with early twentieth-century paintings of folk culture. One work in particular stands out among these images of scenic villages and frolicking peasants for its intricate detail, central location, and large scale: Maksimilijan Vanka's *So That Our Fields May Be Fertile* (*Da bi nam polje rodilo bolje*, c. 1916). The painting, which depicts peasant women making an offering to a framed image of the Madonna against a backdrop of plowed fields, was painted at a moment when the Central Croatian region was still a part of the Hungarian Crownlands of the Habsburg

Monarchy. However, its current place of honor in the offices of the President transforms the work into an icon of today's relatively young Croatian nation-state that claims its roots in the seemingly distinct, premodern folk culture portrayed in Vanka's art.

According to contemporary sources, *So That Our Fields May Be Fertile* actually constitutes one part of a triptych.⁴ The three parts were all based on lines from a folk song: "Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths" ("Lijepa Jela tri vjenca splela").⁵ Today, all three of these paintings are located in prominent spaces in the Croatian capital of Zagreb. The first resides in the Presidential Palace, as described above. The title is based on the inscription painted across the bottom of the painting, but it is also mentioned by an alternate title based on the full lyric of the folk song on which the painting is based: *The First Wreath She Gave to the Virgin Mary, So That Our Fields May Be Fertile* (*Bogorodici dala, da bi nam bolje rodilo bolje*).⁶ The first President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, had admired the painting hanging on the wall of a tennis club that he frequented, and personally selected the work in the early 1990s for his office. Tuđman, who was known for being knowledgeable about art and discussing it with colleagues, liked to highlight the dramatic elements of Vanka's biography.⁷ The second work in the triptych, titled *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths, The Second Wreath She Gave to the*

⁴ This work is described by art historian, critic, and later director of the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt (Museum of Art and Craft) Antun Jiroušek (1873-1949) as a triptych in 1923. I have not located an exhibition in which all three works were exhibited together, but perhaps at some point between 1916 and 1923 they were exhibited together. More research remains to be done on the early exhibition history of these works. Antun Jiroušek, "Naše slike," *Vijenac* 18, no. 6 (6 February 1923).

⁵ Folk songs have many regional variations that can differ from village to village. No song by this exact title is recorded in the archives of the Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku in Zagreb, but several folk songs deal with the same theme of a young woman weaving three wreaths for three recipients. I consulted with Dr. sc. Naila Ceribašić at the Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku in Zagreb who located one titled "Mara plela tri venca zelena" recorded in 1947 in Đelekovec and another titled "Tri vjenca plela Janica divojka" recorded in 1953 in Zagreb.

⁶ Jiroušek, "Naše slike," 118. In 1930 it was reproduced under the title *Blessing of the Grain* (*Blagoslov žita*) in "Izložba Maksimilijana Vanke u Salonu Ullrich od 7.-20. o. mj.," *Svijet* 5, no. 12 (15 March 1930): 294-95.

⁷ President Tuđman purchased the painting from his friend Vinko Hotko, who owned the tennis club where the president regularly played. The painting was purchased with money from the Fund of the Order of President's Knights (Fond Reda predsjednikovih vitezova) in the early 1990s for the Presidential Palace. Đurđica Klancir, "Nerasvijetljene tajne Tuđmanove umjetničke zbirke," *Globus*, 22 Dec 2000, 74-76.

Host (Lijepa Jela tri vijenca splela, drugi vijenac domaćinu dala) (hereafter referred to by its shortened title *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths*, 1916), is located today in the collection of the Croatian History Museum. Though located in an important national collection, it was recently under conservation and has not been exhibited since the 1990s.⁸ The final work, *The Third Wreath She Gave to Her Beloved (Treći vijenac svom dragom dala*, c. 1916), hangs in the building of the Croatian parliament, known as the Sabor, in a salon on the upper viewing level just outside the meeting hall of the parliament.⁹

Describing these works in their present locations highlights what is at stake in the appropriation of early twentieth-century folkloric imagery and visual culture. Vanka's artworks have been taken up as important symbols in spaces of Croatian national imagining. From our present-day viewpoint—after the breakup of two Yugoslavias and the creation of ethnic nation-states in Southeast Europe—the easy and the seemingly natural interpretation of Vanka's triptych is that it represents Croat nationalism. However, such static understandings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Central and Eastern European images of folk culture force present-day political borders onto past artworks. Such interpretations are primordialist and mask the contested history from which folkloric images emerged and into which they intervened. Vanka's triptych has become part of an invented tradition. The embrace of folk culture as a symbol of the

⁸ According to curator Marina Bregovac Pisk, the work was purchased for the Hrvatski povijesni muzej in 1971 from its previous owner in Zagreb. The title *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths* is again based on the inscription painted across the bottom of the painting. In the catalog for the May 1920 Lada (Association of Yugoslavian Artists) exhibition in the Hrvatski umjetnički salon in Zagreb, Vanka listed it under its full title: *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths, The Second Wreath She Gave to the Host (Lijepa Jela tri vijenca splela, drugi vijenac domaćinu dala)*. *Lada 1920.: Izložba "Lade"* (Zagreb: Tisak nadbiskupske tiskare Zagreb, 1920). This catalog is available online through the Digital Collection of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti).

⁹ Curiously this work does not bear an inscription like the other two, nor does it have a signature. *The Third Wreath She Gave to Her Beloved (Treći vijenac svom dragom dala)* is the title used in the exhibition catalog for Vanka's final Zagreb exhibition at Umjetnički paviljon (Art Pavilion) 1-13 April 1934. This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti. In 1923, Antun Jiroušek called the painting simply *She Gave to Her Beloved (Dragome dala)* in Jiroušek, "Naše slike," 118. Alternately, a label added to the frame at some point, probably in the postwar period, titles the work *Celebration of the Harvest (Proslava žetve)*.

new Croatian nation-state attempts “to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” even as it “can never develop or even preserve a living past.”¹⁰ From our present-day viewpoint, traditional rural folk culture is now a distant memory, and as Eric Hobsbawm argues, the invented tradition is strongest when it loses all connection to pragmatic purposes.

This project will explore the time period in which Vanka’s works were created, a time when traditional rural folk culture was still a visible part of Croatian life. If we are able to set aside our twenty-first-century political prejudices, Vanka’s works have incredible potential to tell us about the contested meaning of folk culture, about early-twentieth-century arts and society in the burgeoning metropolis of Zagreb, and about a moment of Yugoslavian political turmoil when national identity was unstable and multiple. I seek to debunk the myth that folk imagery in Central and Eastern Europe only supported reactionary ethnic-nationalisms, and instead explore the ways in which folk imagery was used to support a spectrum of Central-European political identities. The quest for autonomy and economic stability over and against Hungarian and later Serbian attempts to control the region sparked competing loyalties among Croats, who aligned themselves with the Habsburg Monarchy, with multiple versions of Yugoslavism and pan-Slavism, and with the growing Croatian Peasant Party.¹¹

Vanka painted his triptych around 1916, in the midst of World War I.¹² Few imagined that the massive Habsburg Empire might cease to exist in just a couple of years. However, sensing the changing situation, the Yugoslav Committee, a group of Croatian politicians working alongside prominent Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović, were working in exile to promote the idea

¹⁰ E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1, 8.

¹¹ The present-day Croatian state consists of three main regions. The regions of Croatia and Slavonia were both under Hungarian rule in the Dual Monarchy, while Dalmatia belonged to the Austrian crown lands.

¹² Only *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths* bears a date of 1916 in the signature. There is a photograph of the artist with the completed *So That Our Fields May Be Fertile* with a handwritten inscription of 1917. This suggests *The Third Wreath She Gave to Her Beloved* was also painted between 1916 and 1917.

of a Yugoslav state.¹³ In 1914, Vanka had just completed his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, and then served as a Belgian Red Cross officer witnessing the horrors of the German invasion of Belgium before escaping the country and returning to Zagreb.¹⁴ The young artist had painted his first work with folkloric motifs three years prior for the 1913 Brussels Salon. His *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths* triptych still bears all of the trappings of that traditional salon approach to painting. The monumental size of the panels (each over five by six feet), their naturalistic detail, and their narrative format present all the features of history painting. Yet, rather than trumpeting a scene from mythological, religious, or military sources, Vanka exalted traditional Croatian folk ceremonies. The folk song from which the image derives its title describes a tradition in which wreaths are woven during the harvest from plants and flowers, given as gifts, and then stored in a place of honor until the next harvest. In his three paintings, “Jela” gives a woven wreath first to an icon of the Madonna (the painting that is now in the Presidential Palace), then to the host of a feast next to his bountiful table (the work currently stored in the Croatian History Museum), and finally to her beloved mounted on horseback (on view in the Croatian Parliament). However, in each painting “Jela” appears as a different young woman, wearing the folk dress of three distinct regions around Central Croatia.¹⁵ “Jela” seemingly stands in for all the young women maintaining Croatian tradition.

¹³ The Yugoslav Committee was founded in late 1914. It was headed by Ante Trumbić and Frano Supilo.

¹⁴ As a citizen of Austria-Hungary, Vanka would presumably have been considered an enemy of the Belgian state, but according to Louis Adamic, Queen Elizabeth intervened on Vanka’s behalf because of his noble heritage, making him an officer in the Red Cross. Louis Adamic, *My America, 1928-1938* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), 167.

¹⁵ *So That Our Fields May Be Fertile* depicts the folk dress of the Moslavina region located south of Zagreb around the town of Sisak. *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths* depicts the folk dress of Kupinec or Bratina, villages just southwest of Zagreb in the Jadransko polje region. *The Third Wreath She Gave to Her Beloved* depicts the folk dress of the village of Rečica just east of Karlovac. It is noteworthy that Vanka does not choose to depict the three historic regions of Croatia (Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia), but instead only depicts folk dress from Central Croatia. I owe a debt of gratitude to Vesna Zorić, *muzejska savjetnica* at the Etnografski Muzej Zagreb, for assistance with the identification of the geographical origin of folk dress in these paintings, as well as others discussed in this project. Any mistakes of identification are my own.

Why was Vanka painting such striking images of Croatian folk culture in the midst of World War I and to whom were they directed? The present locations of these three paintings implies that this triptych was intended to help Croats imagine themselves as a national community. However, the visual evidence of the history painting formats and balanced compositions, as well as the circumstantial evidence of Vanka's cosmopolitan upbringing, academic education, and recent exhibit in the Brussels salon, point to the fact that this triptych was actually intended for an elite, cosmopolitan, European audience. Vanka created a window for this elite audience into the folk traditions of a remote corner of the Habsburg Monarchy. Although the exhibition history of these works remains incomplete, it is clear that the earliest that one of them was exhibited in Zagreb was in 1920, three years after their completion. The other two were not exhibited in Croatia until over a decade later and may have been painted copies of the originals that remained abroad.¹⁶ As I argue in this project, Vanka's folkloric works were not created with the primary aim of fostering Croatian national borders. Rather, his most consistent aim was to lend dignity to the lives and culture of rural inhabitants both domestically and internationally and to shine light on social and economic injustice.

¹⁶ Antun Jiroušek states in his 1923 article that both *So That Our Fields May Be Fertile* and *The Third Wreath She Gave to Her Beloved* were located in Brussels. Exhibition catalogs suggest that Vanka did not exhibit either of them in Zagreb until Vanka's 1930 solo exhibition in Galerija Ullrich and Vanka's 1934 departing exhibition in the Umjetnički paviljon respectively. It is possible that those could have been reproductions. *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths* was exhibited in Zagreb in a 1920 Lada exhibition held at the Hrvatski umjetnički salon, which makes sense given that Jiroušek claimed it was the only work in the triptych to stay in Zagreb. Jiroušek, "Naše slike."

1.2 VANKA'S LEGACY

A number of post-Cold-War scholarly studies have attempted to analyze the modern art of Central and Eastern Europe as a whole including those by Steven Mansbach and Timothy O. Benson.¹⁷ These studies tend to focus on the international avant-garde, whose work partakes in the abstraction valued by narratives of Western European modernism. Certainly Vanka's naturalistic works painted in a Western academic style of distinctly Croatian subject matter do not fit into a narrative of modernist abstraction. Mansbach and Benson's accounts profitably extend the Western canon of Modern Art eastward, they overlook the diverse experiences of modernity and the different artistic expressions of that modernity that prevailed in Central and Eastern Europe. As Piotr Piotrowski emphasizes in his writings, Western-European "-isms" often took on new meanings when later adopted in local CEE contexts.¹⁸ A consciousness of modernization without its actual presence, the continued strength of folk culture, and growing ethnic nationalisms meant to unite the two previous forces all work to differentiate the modernities and modernisms of the region from their Western European counterparts. Looking at Vanka's work can begin to uncover these differences.

Despite the recent placement of Vanka's paintings in prominent spaces of Croatian national imagining, Vanka is an artist who has been largely ignored by art historians in postwar Yugoslavia, Croatia, and the United States. His work is brushed aside in the history of Croatian modern art. In his foundational text *Twentieth-Century Croatian Painting (Hrvatsko slikarstvo XX. stoljeća)* of 1997, art historian Grgo Gamulin wrote:

¹⁷ Steven A. Mansbach, *Modern art in Eastern Europe: from the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890-1939* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Timothy O. Benson, *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910-1930* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, MIT Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Piotr Piotrowski, "How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?" *Third Text* 23, no. 1 (2009): 5-14.

The burden of folkloric and decorative elements...made him follow the path of narrative regionalism. This proved to be fatal for Vanka for the rest of his life and it was because of this that the first history of modern art in Croatia dedicated no more than three lines to this artist. Moreover, this is the reason why he truly became a problematic name for our art critics, a questionable figure of Croatian painting, mostly neglected and rarely known.¹⁹

Why did those folkloric paintings, which were undoubtedly his most popular and well-known works during his career in Croatia, become the cause for his exclusion from the history of modern Croatian art? I would argue that critical and scholarly neglect of Vanka's folkloric work—and of early twentieth-century folkloric imagery more generally—rests on assumptions that naturalistic folkloric paintings are reactionary, artistically unsophisticated, and a simplistic expression of ethnic-national identity.²⁰ Furthermore, early reviews of Vanka's paintings reveal that the peculiar mixture of the real and the imagined in his folkloric works troubled many critics. Gamulin wrote that it was because of the “ethnographic fabulation” (“*etnografsko fabuliranje*”) that pervaded Vanka's major works that he was left out of the history of that region's modern art—a criticism that he gleaned from the writings of important interwar critics including Kosta Strajnić, Ivo Hergešić, and Ivo Šrepel among others.²¹ Early twentieth-century critics spent many words grappling with these folkloric paintings, sometimes praising Vanka

¹⁹ It was the early success of the painting *The Suppliants* (*Proštenjari*, 1913) that in Gamulin's opinion encouraged Vanka to paint his series of large-scale paintings of folk customs in the late 1910s and early 1920s. See Chapter 2 for more on *Proštenjari*. “Folklorno/dekorativni teret, do kojega je i došlo možda zbog uspjeha već spomenute slike [*Proštenjari*], poveo ga je putem tog narativnog regionalizma; što je za nj bilo doživotno kobno i što je uvjetovalo da u prvoj povijesti naše moderne umjetnosti bude samo usput spomenut sa jedva tri crte; da zaista postane problem za našu kritiku, dvojbena pojava našeg slikarstva, zanemarena i jedva poznata.” Grgo Gamulin, “Maksimilijan Vanka,” in *Hrvatsko slikarstvo XX. stoljeća* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1997), 179.

²⁰ Vanka was not alone in being lost to the history of Croatian modern art. Painters Joso Bužan and Slavko Tomerlin, who also specialized in folkloric paintings, met a similar fate, although it is generally agreed that Vanka's work was of a higher quality than theirs. In a 1913 review of Vanka's work, Andrija Milčinović compares Vanka to Bužan, but complained that Bužan “often goes too far as a painter of rural life to meet our public...” and “likes to stay on the surface...,” showing that Vanka's work was perceived as less middle-brow or popular. Andrija Milčinović, “Dešković i Vanka,” *Savremenik* VIII (1913): 751.

²¹ Kosta Strajnić, “Mladja umjetnička generacija,” *Savremenik* X, no. 11 and 12 (December 1915); Ivo Hergešić, “Maksimilijan Vanka – prigodom izložbe u Umjetničkom paviljonu,” *Hrvatska revija* 7, no. 4 (1934); Ivo Šrepel, “Maksimilijan Vanka (uz kolektivnu izložbu u Umjetničkom paviljonu),” *Jutarnji list*, 13 April 1934.

romantically as the true capturer of national spirit and heart, and sometimes dismissing him as an “embroiderer” of works that were too bright, too cluttered, or too decorative.²² However, examining the writing of these interwar critics alongside other primary sources reveals that the various ways in which Vanka’s works were exhibited, interpreted, and appropriated repeatedly defy simple interpretation as nationalist visual culture and reveal the complex layering of reality and construction that are present in Vanka’s folkloric works. Indeed, such an examination yields a much richer picture of what images of folk culture meant—and indeed what it meant to make modern art—in early twentieth-century Croatia than previous scholarly neglect would have us believe.

Two exhibitions, one held in the United States and one held in Croatia, occasioned the best biographical catalogs and historical information to date about Vanka and his work. David Leopold put together the most complete exhibition of Vanka’s work up to this point, *The Gift of Sympathy: The Art of Maxo Vanka*, in 2001 to 2002 for the James A. Michener Art Museum, located near the artist’s family home in Rushland, Pennsylvania.²³ This slim but informative catalog also includes an essay on Vanka’s formative years in Europe by the Croatian scholar Nikola Vizner, who wrote his 2004 dissertation on Vanka.²⁴ In 2002 the respected Galerija klovićevi dvori in Zagreb also staged a retrospective exhibition organized by Croatian scholar Nevenka Komarica called *Maksimilijan Vanka 1889-1963: Retrospektivna Izložba*.²⁵ Since little has been documented about the artist’s life and work, these exhibitions tended to focus on giving a much-needed overview of the artist’s career and attempting to recover the merit of Vanka’s

²² That Vanka’s colleagues nicknamed him “embroiderer” is recorded in V, “Ausstellung Maksimilijan Vanka,” *Morgenblatt*, 16 March 1930, 8.

²³ David Leopold, ed., *The Gift of Sympathy: The Art of Maxo Vanka* (Doylestown, PA: James A. Michener Art Museum, 2001).

²⁴ Nikola Vizner, “Hrvatsko američki slikar Maksimilijan Vanka” (Dissertation, Sveučilište u Zadru, 2004).

²⁵ Nevenka Posavec Komarica, ed., *Maksimilijan Vanka 1889-1963: retrospektivna izložba* (Zagreb, Croatia: Galerija Klovićevi dvori, 2002).

work and career from obscurity. An exception is the small 1997 exhibition at Galerija Ulrich dedicated to Vanka's portrait work, which organizer Snježana Pintarić claimed reached its peak in the symbolist-expressionist portraits from 1915 to 1920 very early in Vanka's career.²⁶ These art historians share an understanding that Vanka was "a Catholic tending toward mysticism, a cosmopolitan with strong national feelings," but fail to thoroughly explore how he used these artworks to express this identity.²⁷ Beyond these works, few scholarly articles or books have addressed Vanka's work and are still much needed.²⁸

Vanka said and wrote very little about himself and his work beyond a few broadly scattered letters.²⁹ However, commentary from Vanka's close friend, the socialist author Louis Adamic (1898-1951), appeared in no short supply after Vanka's immigration to the United States in 1934. Adamic's writings established an emphasis on Vanka's biography and Slavic background and played a large part in shaping the way the artist's work was perceived at the time of his immigration and continues to be perceived in the United States today. He befriended Vanka in 1932 while traveling in Yugoslavia on a Guggenheim Fellowship. His travels resulted in the publication of *The Native's Return: An American Immigrant Visits Yugoslavia and Discovers His Old Country*, which became a US bestseller.³⁰ In 1936 he wrote a Bildungsroman based on a fictionalized account of Vanka's life, *Cradle of Life: The Story of One Man's*

²⁶ Snježana Pintarić, ed., *Maksimilijan Vanka: Portreti* (Zagreb: Galerija Ulrich, Likum, 1997).

²⁷ "...katolik sklon misticizmu, kozmopolit s jakim nacionalnim osjećajem..." Pintarić, *Maksimilijan Vanka: Portreti*.

²⁸ In fact a thorough account of Vanka's career remains to be written and both Nikola Vizner and Nevenka Komarica have been working on book-length projects about the artist.

²⁹ Most of the existing letters written by Vanka are in the possession of the artist's family in the Vanka-Brasko Family Archive in Rushland, Pennsylvania and in a collection of papers donated to the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti) now in the Maksimilijan Vanka Papers, Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora (Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters). A few letters to and from Margaret Stetten Vanka are in the Louis Adamic Papers, Princeton University. Several postwar letters from Vanka to Ivan Meštrović are in the Ivan Mestrovic Papers (MST), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, IN. More letters written by Vanka probably await to be discovered in artists' personal archives in Croatia.

³⁰ Louis Adamic, *The Native's Return: An American Immigrant Visits Yugoslavia and Discovers His Old Country* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934).

Beginnings, which emphasized Vanka's aristocratic parentage, his upbringing by a peasant wet nurse, and his dramatic return to nobility.³¹ In Adamic's 1938 memoirs, *My America, 1928-1938*, he also dedicated a chapter to the story of his friendship with Vanka and the latter's immigration.³²

The absence of substantial writings by Vanka about his own art has opened his work to interpretation and appropriation in intervening decades. I consistently encounter opposing views of Vanka's art that reveal how artists' works can become political without their intent. On one hand, there are some who see Vanka as a guardian of Croat national identity. This is evidenced by a number of occurrences including the painting-over of his apparently threatening folkloric *Gradski podrum* murals in 1946 with more pro-Yugoslav motifs, the appearance of Vanka's artworks in a right-wing Croatian exile magazine in the 1950s, and the hanging of Vanka's paintings in the offices of the current regime in the 1990s already discussed.³³

In contrast, a second group would like to see Vanka as an apolitical hero of the downtrodden. Those who visit St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church in Millvale, Pennsylvania today to see Vanka's murals (1937, 1941), are encouraged by the guides—who are mostly members of the church—to focus on the antiwar and social justice messages of these works. While such themes certainly run strong in the Millvale Murals, visitors are discouraged from also considering the relationship of these works to nationalism. The guides' approach, I assume, is the result of a well-intentioned desire to keep relations cordial among the successor nations of the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001) and perhaps it is also the result of a general postwar assumption that all nationalisms are bad. Following Adamic's example, this second group places emphasis on the

³¹ Louis Adamic, *Cradle of Life: The Story of One Man's Beginnings* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936).

³² Adamic, *My America*.

³³ Jure Prpic, "Maksimilijan Vanka: Zabora vljeni hrvatski slikar i njegov doprinos Americi," *Hrvatska Revija (Buenos Aires)* VIII, no. 2 (30) (June 1958). For more on the *Gradski podrum* murals see Chapter 4.

dramatic details of Vanka's life—his illegitimate birth to Habsburg nobility, his upbringing by a peasant wet nurse in the Croatian countryside, his courtship of an American heiress—and avoids dealing directly with the nationalist or political consequences of folkloric imagery. Leopold's and Komarica's catalogs both follow this largely apolitical perspective and tend to focus on biography while glossing over the relationship of Vanka's folkloric imagery to the historical Yugoslav context. While this viewpoint rightfully draws attention to Vanka's respectful treatment of folk culture and empathy for the plight of the lower classes, it leans dubiously close to romanticized views of the authenticity and spirituality of the native's insight. This is evidenced by Vizner's descriptions of Vanka's folkloric works in the 2001 *Gift of Sympathy* catalog:

In his interpretation of the peasant life of Croatian villages, Vanka is unique. He depicts customs, struggles, emotions, superstitions, attitudes, and the color of the peasant world with the eye of an artist and the precision of an ethnographer. He deeply understands village life and its soul: the passive suffering and happiness which are intertwined in life. These paintings have a mystic charge. In them Vanka comprehends the deep, natural mysticism and religiosity of peasants: their strange, almost pagan rites that are closer to the atavistic paganism of the village than to Christianity. These paintings explain the world in terms of the unknown and the supernatural.³⁴

Vizner's description leaves out the important historical context of the works; he mentions only in passing that this imagery holds "national cultural and historical dimensions."³⁵ In fact, as this analysis will show, Vanka's use of folk motifs was implicitly political and deeply connected to cultural nationalism in Croatia.

These two views of Vanka, one as an essentially nationalist artist and the other as an apolitical artist seem opposed but often a person paradoxically expresses both views

³⁴ Nikola Vizner, "Homeland: Croatia 1916-1934," in *The Gift of Sympathy: The Art of Maxo Vanka*, ed. David Leopold (Doylestown, PA: James A. Michener Art Museum, 2001), 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

simultaneously without realizing they would have Vanka be both political and apolitical at the same time. Or, much more treacherously, extreme nationalism regularly attempts to hide its face behind the harmless celebration of folk culture. To ignore the role of nationalism would be to deny the period in which Vanka lived and worked. Even more importantly, to ignore the role of nationalism allows these works to be appropriated by extreme political viewpoints. Vanka's folkloric artworks represent a variety of shifting and developing identities that emerged over the course of the interwar period—not just Croatian nationalism. He started by using folk culture in the way that we see in the *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths* triptych—playing up Croatia's place as the exotic periphery to appeal to European and Habsburg cosmopolitanism. As the following chapters will explore, he then used Croatian folk culture to promote other identities including Yugoslavism during World War I, nationalism and socialism after 1928, and finally first- and second-generation immigrant identity in the United States.

1.3 MUTABLE IDENTITIES

In the summer of 2010, I was asked to catalog works located in eastern Pennsylvania at the Vanka family estate by the organization working to preserve Vanka's murals in St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church in Millvale, Pennsylvania (hereafter referred to as the Millvale Murals). Sifting through hundreds of oil painting and drawings in a dusty attic, what jumped out at me were a number of bold images of folk culture, compiled in a scrapbook, that Vanka had created in Yugoslavia and carried with him into exile in 1934. Using archival materials from the artist's estate and initial research in Zagreb, I argued in my master's thesis that Vanka used images of Croatian folk culture to play an active and instrumental role in creating Croatian

nationalist symbols in the context of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and then in the Millvale Murals in the United States. However, as I delved deeper for my dissertation research, it became apparent that Vanka is a figure who demands a transnational approach. Many of his artworks deal with potent national imagery, and yet a close examination reveals his identity is not tied to one nation. As will be described in the following chapters, his work negotiated a range of mutable Central European identities—cosmopolitan, nationalist, pan-nationalist, socialist, and immigrant. All of these contested identities made use of folk culture in different ways, which makes Vanka’s work so illuminating to study.

My dissertation uses Vanka’s folkloric artwork as the lens for exploring how the production, circulation, and reception of objects and images related to Croatian folk culture played an active role in attempting to incorporate populations into various imperial and national allegiances. I am not trying to recuperate Vanka into art history’s dominant high modernist canon; stylistically his academic naturalism precludes his addition there. However, as my project explores, the drive for social and political change that serve as the impetus for Vanka’s works is in many regards no less modern than the ideas of the traditional avant-garde. Thus Vanka’s work makes a powerful argument for the need to foster an evolving canon of global modern art that is more open to exploring the complex processes of modernity on the peripheries and even far outside the West that express themselves in alternative modernisms.

The more modest goal of this project is to use Vanka’s art to help uncover some of the original motivations and reception of images and displays of Croatian folk culture in the early twentieth century. Historical critical reception of Vanka’s works clearly reveals that these folkloric works are the ones that Vanka was most well-known for during his twenty-year career in Zagreb from 1913 to 1934. My research has uncovered a series of Vanka’s works dealing with

folk culture produced between 1913 and 1941, including at least twelve large-scale oil paintings, scenography for a ballet, a trade fair poster, and two sets of murals—one in Zagreb and one in Pittsburgh. My methodology involves an interdisciplinary approach that combines visual analysis of these works with reception study and grounds both in the history of politics, art, mass media, and ethnography. I seek to move these works away from their current appropriation as Croatian nationalist symbols, and instead to examine how Vanka's works functioned and were received in the period in which they were created.

For the study of Central and Eastern Europe, nationalism has become an almost mandatory framework. Although this project seeks to move beyond monolithic understandings of national identity in the region, nationalist theory is still relevant for working through the construction of these multiple and competing identities. For decades, many foundational scholars of nationalism, including Ernest Gellner and George Mosse, included imagery, monuments, and even folk culture in their accounts of nationalism as self-evident nationalist symbols.³⁶ There are a couple major problems with that basic approach that will be confronted in this study. First, Gellner and many of the scholars that followed in his wake saw little merit in analyzing individually the local iterations of nationalist principles and symbols. Gellner's universalist model saw each incarnation of nationalism as generic and interchangeable. Paradoxically, he denied the complexity of nationalist symbolism even as he himself admitted, "These populations of eastern Europe were still locked into complex multiple loyalties of kinship, territory, and religion. To make them conform to the nationalist imperative was bound to take...a great deal of

³⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

very forceful cultural engineering.”³⁷ Nationalisms are brought about by the presence of similar modern social, political, and industrial conditions, but, as this project will underline, their content requires the mining of immediate, local circumstances and symbols in order to be meaningful. By studying those individual incarnations, scholars can learn a great deal about local conditions of modernity.

In contrast, Anthony Smith’s ethno-symbolist approach offers art historians some useful tools.³⁸ Although his approach has been criticized for flirting with primordialism, he is willing to focus on the use of ethnic symbolic resources that create “common consciousness,” a “distinctive symbolic repertoire,” and continuity. He urges scholars to examine collective symbols whose “meanings may change over time but whose forms remain relatively fixed.”³⁹ Additionally he emphasizes the contested nature of nationalism and its symbols, including how they are used differently by the elite and lower classes and the importance of internal competing visions of nationalism. This supports the examination of the changing use of images of Croatian folk culture for a variety of identities that stretch beyond nationalism. To this, I would add that examining the content and style of nationalist visual culture can provide valuable insight into how reactionary or progressive a certain nationalism is.

The second problem presented by traditional theories of nationalism is that viewers of nationalist imagery are often understood as passively and unproblematically absorbing nationalist ideologies. This issue stems in part from our desire to read current nation-states back

³⁷ Ibid., 100.

³⁸ Anthony Smith was a student of Gellner’s whose ethno-symbolist approach was developed in his 1986 book *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* and has most recently been formulated in his 2009 *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*. Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1986).

³⁹ Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, 25.

onto the communities of earlier periods.⁴⁰ This project aligns itself with recent and growing efforts to better understand constructions of nationalism by examining the ways in which visual objects and other practices in Central Europe were and are actively made, viewed, and re-appropriated for competing identities.⁴¹ In order to address this oversight, my work reassesses Vanka's folk imagery in light of the most recent studies of interwar Yugoslav history. These studies position themselves against claims—made most prominently in Ivo Banac's foundational text, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*—that distinct Croatian and Serbian identities were already solidified in the interwar period and led to the breakup of Yugoslavia.⁴² The new argument, influenced by Tara Zahra and Pieter Judson's work on "national indifference" in the Habsburg Monarchy, suggests that Croatian and Serbian identities were not solidified but rather constantly negotiated throughout the period by politicians who genuinely wanted this multi-nation state to work.⁴³ This is an important argument because it dismisses notions of primordial hatreds brewing for centuries in the Balkans. Similarly, Vanka's work helps illuminate the way in which interwar Croatian artists represented a spectrum of changing and developing identities in their works in an attempt to adapt to the shifting political circumstances around them.

⁴⁰ Jeremy King warns scholars of Central European history not to utilize an "ethnicism" methodology to read nations back onto nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history. Jeremy King, "The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond," in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, ed. Maria Bucur-Deckard and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001).

⁴¹ For example see Nancy M. Wingfield and Cynthia Paces, "The Sacred and the Profane: Religion and Nationalism in the Bohemian Lands, 1880-1920," in *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, ed. Pieter M. Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblit (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

⁴² The most outspoken opponent of Ivo Banac is Dejan Djoković. Dejan Djoković, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Dejan Djoković and James Ker-Lindsay, *New perspectives on Yugoslavia: Key Issues and Controversies* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁴³ Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (Spring 2010); Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

1.3.1 Whose *narod*?: A Brief History of Competing Identities in Croatia

In the early stages of this project, I was troubled by a basic, but fundamental question that I needed to answer: how conscious were early twentieth-century Croatians of having a distinct national identity? The visual and written evidence explored here made it clear that by the interwar period there were a number of people, focused most heavily in urban areas of Central Croatia, who often expressed what it meant to be Croat: to be Roman Catholic, to be too long under the yoke of foreign rule, and to practice and appreciate a certain set of folk traditions that emerged from the materials and limitations of the landscape itself. Significantly, it also became clear that Croatian identity did not exclude a broad array of other competing Central European identities: European, cosmopolitan, Yugoslav, socialist. It was possible to be these and many other things while at the same time being Croat. In short, the image of the self can be just as multifaceted and contradictory as that of the Other. From our contemporary perspective, we are often too quick to assume that nineteenth- and twentieth-century art and mass media depicting Croatian folk culture could only be direct visualizations of Croatian nationalism. But it is important to step back and question exactly whose identity and whose nation is being imagined through such imagery. The Habsburg Empire, the Croatian nation, the quest for a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia, Yugoslavism, pan-Slavism, socialism, fascism—all of these various political entities and ideologies made use of the image of the Croatian peasant to some extent. Some continue to appropriate them as they reemerge and enter back into cultural discourse. Few historians or art historians have traced the active and shifting use of folkloric motifs to construct identities in the context of Central and Eastern Europe's complex political modernization. Vanka's images of Croatian folk culture and the visual culture surrounding them embody this complexity.

Underscoring the slipperiness of identity in the Yugoslav regions is the fact that it is not just visually evasive, but that this slipperiness is also ingrained in language. The words used to describe nation and nationality in the Yugoslav regions have been and continue to be flexible. In the Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian languages the word “*narod*” translates to both “nation” and the “folk” that make up that nation.⁴⁴ *Narod* is a flexible term that could be and still is used by speakers and writers to imply a range of imagined communities. Within the context of constantly shifting imperial and state boundaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Croatian lands, *narod* was used at times to refer to specific ethnic groups including the Croats or Serbs, to a greater Croatia or Serbia that included Bosnia, to the more general Yugoslav nation, or a pan-Slavic nation together with Czechs. *Narod* could even sometimes be used ambiguously to avoid adopting any specific identity. The various peoples of the Yugoslav regions developed a variety of linguistic tools to avoid completely the topic of specific ethnic identity referring to “*naš narod*” (our nation/folk), “*naš jezik*” (our language), or fellow countrymen as simply “*naši*” (ours). Passive and active resistance to nationalism was just as prevalent as embracing nationalism in early twentieth-century Croatian lands. This slipperiness aligns itself with the fact that throughout the nineteenth and perhaps even into the twentieth century, the average rural inhabitant—the peasant—in both the Croatian regions and the Balkans felt little or no national allegiance. His or her identity was much more likely to be rooted in religion and specifically local conditions.⁴⁵ The elites were the initiators of early nationalist movements.

⁴⁴ “*Narod*” contrasts with the more neutral term “*država*,” which refers to the official governing “country” or “state.” Though Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian are often taught together in the United States, they are formally considered three different languages. Political differences, especially between Croatia and Serbia, have manifested in linguistic distancing. In the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia they were referred to as one language, Serbo-Croatian.

⁴⁵ Mark Biondich, *The Balkans: Revolution, War, and Political Violence since 1878* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44.

It has been well documented by theorists of nationalism including Miroslav Hroch and, building on Hroch's work, Ernest Gellner that nationalisms developed differently in the Habsburg Empire than in Western Europe.⁴⁶ In Habsburg Europe, nationalism was driven by an ethnic difference between those in power—German-Austrians and Hungarians—and those without power—a number of mostly Slavic peoples. The ethnic groups in power sought to impose their high culture on their subjects, who shared their own folk culture rather than a high culture. Those who were ruled over lived in primarily agrarian regions and had little access to education. To become “nationalists” they required an “intellectual-awakener” to research and promote the specific qualities of the nation (cultural, linguistic, and historical) and to foster the creation of a new national high culture that would compete with the high culture of the ruling class and create a mass movement.

Prompted by the spread of nationalist ideas through the Napoleonic occupations of the region, the first wave of nationalism in the Croatian regions was headed by a group called the Illyrians who were originally active from the 1830s to the 1850s, although their ideas held power long into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sometimes framed today as the first wave of Croatian nationalism, the Illyrians were actually the originators of Yugoslavism, the idea of a political unity among all Southern Slavs—Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes. Led by Ljudevit Gaj (1809-1872), it was a movement of the intellectual class—primarily clergy, officials, students, and artists, who made up only a small percentage of the population.⁴⁷ The Illyrians sought to

⁴⁶ Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), originally published in German in 1968; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

⁴⁷ Scholar Dennison Rusinow estimates that at the time of the 1857 Austrian census, when Catholic Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmeyer was extending the idea of Yugoslavism, the elite class of intellectuals, clergy, wealthier merchants, and lower nobility made up less than two percent of the population and conditions remained similar up until 1910. Dennison Rusinow, "The Yugoslav Idea Before Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst, 2003), 13.

preserve and strengthen Southern Slavic identity in general against Magyarization, the cultural and political hegemony of Hungarian nationalism.

In Austria-Hungary and the surrounding regions nationalist movements usually went hand-in-hand with language reform and the Croatian Illyrians were no exception. Indeed, in formal settings in the Croatian regions including the university and the Sabor (the Croatian parliament) the required language was Latin, and political subjugation to Italy, Austria, and Hungary only further suppressed the native language.⁴⁸ Gaj, a linguist, published in 1830 his version of the Croatian Latin alphabet, *Brief Basics of Croatian-Slavonic Orthography* (*Kratka osnova horvastko-slavenskog praopisanja*), and soon after received permission to begin printing a Croatian-language newspaper. Although Gaj and other reformers spoke the *kajkavski* dialect from the area around Zagreb, they chose the *štokavski* dialect used by the majority of Croats and Serbs to become the movement's—and thus Croatia's—official dialect.⁴⁹ This more broadly spoken dialect was also significant because it linguistically unified the inland Croatia-Zagorje region and the coastal Dalmatia region, which were politically split between Hungarian and Austrian rule in the Empire.⁵⁰ This newfound linguistic and cultural nationalism led several political figures to seek the political unification of Croatia in the late Habsburg Empire, but their efforts were to no avail. The bishop Josip Juraj Strossmeyer continued the Illyrian legacy by

⁴⁸ Language use and nation-building were intricately interwoven issues in Austria-Hungary. Marx and Engels labeled most Eastern European countries as a-historical, or counter-revolutionary because their primary languages were used only by a small group of mostly peasants. See Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, *Ethnology, Myth, and Politics: Anthropologizing Croatian Ethnology*, ed. Jasna Čapo Žmegač (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 14. For more on nationalism, national indifference, and language use in Austria-Hungary see Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria*.

⁴⁹ By the nineteenth century three main dialects of Croatian existed: *kajkavski* was spoken in Zagreb and the surrounding area of Hrvatsko Zagorje, *čakavski* was used in Istria and parts of the Dalmatian coast, and *štokavski* in Dalmatia, Herzegovina, and Dubrovnik. Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 77.

⁵⁰ *Štokavski* was also the dialect of the coastal city Dubrovnik. Although Dubrovnik had recently fallen on hard times, it had been a cultural and literary center during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, thus linking the Illyrian movement with a perceived golden historic past.

using funds from his wealthy diocese of Slavonia to found the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1866, which promoted cultural knowledge in the region.

As it was invented by the Illyrians and promoted by other Croatians in the years leading up to World War I, the early idea of Yugoslavism was perceived as a way to gain more political autonomy for the Croatian lands. But viewpoints varied among proponents of Yugoslavism, and debates surfaced. Did Southern Slavs constitute one united cultural whole or an alliance of linguistically related but culturally different nations? Should a Yugoslav state be centralized or federalized? As Dejan Djokić has pointed out in his edited volume *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea*, "...Yugoslavism was a fluid concept, understood differently at different times by different Yugoslav nations, leaders and social groups."⁵¹ In Serbia, for example, those who dreamed of uniting all of Balkan "Serbdom" into a Greater Serbia saw the Yugoslav idea as a means to realize a Serbian nationalist goal.⁵² Thus, Yugoslavism often became an ideology or means to achieve the aims of other nationalisms.⁵³

A distinctly Croatian nationalism (rather than Yugoslav) emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. Brothers Stjepan and Antun Radić founded an agrarian party called the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka*, hereafter HSS) in 1904. The HSS desired to improve the status of the peasant and to create a unified Croatian peasant state. Because they lived in an agrarian society that lacked a strong middle class, one of the main problems that faced early Croatian nationalists was an inability to span the broad divide between the urban upper classes and the rural peasantry, who made up more than eighty percent of the population in the

⁵¹ Djokić, *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea*, 1918-1992, 4.

⁵² In its most extreme form this involved the belief that Croatian Catholics and Bosnian Muslims were all in fact Serbs.

⁵³ See Rusinow, "The Yugoslav Idea Before Yugoslavia" in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea*, 1918-1992, ed. Djokić.

decades before World War I.⁵⁴ The Illyrian's pan-Slavism had been based on high arts and literature at a time when most Croatians could not read or write, but the Radić's new nationalism was aimed at the majority. The party fought to help the lower classes by supporting basic "peasant rights" ("*seljačko pravo*"), which aimed for improving the economic, political, and social standing of the peasant.⁵⁵ Instead of high art, the HSS promoted and preserved folk culture including peasant song and dance, and privileged the traditional textiles and embroidery of the rural regions. It did this in part through a cultural and educational organization called Peasant Harmony (Seljačka sloga). A newspaper report from one of the meetings of the HSS reveals how Stjepan Radić accessorized himself with folk culture:

Around 12 o'clock the President of the Croatian Republican Peasant Party, Sjepan Radić, appeared on horseback. Before him rode about 150 riders on horses decorated with folk embroidery. ... The villages through which the president passed, were all decorated with Croatian flags, and windows were decorated with artistic handicrafts. At the assembly 10,000 peasants were present...⁵⁶

Towards its aims of bringing together the urban upper and middle classes and the rural poor, the party sought to unite folk culture with urban culture.⁵⁷ Indeed folk culture was a major inspiration for the region's interwar fashions as will be explored in Chapter 3. Much of the visual culture that will be explored in this study falls in this realm of folk culture being shaped and adapted for an urban and largely bourgeois audience.

Few had thought that the Great War would bring to an end to the enormous Dual Monarchy, but the strain of war proved too difficult for its fragile balance of nations. During the war, the Yugoslav Committee, headed by Croatian politicians, including prominent Croatian

⁵⁴ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 64.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁶ Published in *Obzor*, 11 June 1923. Quoted in Aleksandra Muraj, Nerina Eckhel, and Vesna Zorić, *Pokupska sjećanja: etnografska ekspedicija 1923* (Zagreb: Etnografski muzej 1993), 6.

⁵⁷ Jasna Galjer and Andrea Klobučar, "Narodni izraz i nacionalni identitet u djelovanju Branke Frangeš Hegedušić," *KAJ - časopis za književnost, umjetnost, kulturu* XLV, no. 6 (2012).

artist Ivan Meštrović, and with the support of the Serbian monarchy, campaigned in Western Europe for political support for a united South Slav state. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes formed shortly after the November armistice in 1918 as a constitutional monarchy with the Serbian king at its head, and eventually received official recognition at the Paris Peace Conference. Exact numbers do not exist for the ethnic make-up of interwar Yugoslavia, but the estimates suggest it was 43 percent Orthodox Serbs (including Montenegrins), 23 percent Croats, 8.5 percent Slovenes, 5 percent Macedonians, and 6 percent Bosnian Muslims.⁵⁸ There was no clear ethnic majority, and within the Kingdom these ethnic groups were spoken of at various points as one united nation and as three nations brought together in a federation.

That state soon faced political turmoil from within. The legality of the constitution signed on St. Vitus's Day 28 June 1921 (the Vidovdan Constitution) was challenged by the HSS—by far the leading Croatian party—which boycotted the parliament until 1925. It was not any primordial ethnic hatred that troubled interwar Yugoslavia. Much of the animosity that existed between Serbs and Croats in the period following the Great War and throughout the 1920s stemmed from the perception that Belgrade was bartering off sections of the Adriatic coast to appease an irredentist Italy. Many also saw Belgrade as bent on creating an economically and demographically weaker Croatia that would not compete with a centralized Serbian power. Croats feared this was an attempt to create a greater Serbia and not a united Yugoslavia. However, even after Stjepan Radić was shot in the Belgrade parliament, which resulted in a royal dictatorship established on 6 January 1929, both Serb and Croat politicians still worked to find a Yugoslav solution up until the end of the 1930s.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 202.

⁵⁹ Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*.

Against the backdrop of these political challenges, early twentieth-century Croatian modern artists and museums were occupied with the question of how to express visually these various competing identities. Not surprisingly, deciphering how to express a local identity that could be communicated globally was quite complicated for these early twentieth-century artists and curators, many of whom had studied in the cultural centers of Western Europe and were intimately familiar with Western modernity. There were various attempts at achieving this, but folkloric imagery offered one avenue—the one pursued by Vanka and many of his contemporaries who will be discussed in the following chapters.

1.4 HARSH REALITIES AND CONSTRUCTED FANTASIES

Depictions and exhibitions of peasants and their folk dress were a ubiquitous part of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century visual culture of Central and Eastern Europe. Before I delve into this study of the images and displays of Croatian folk culture in a number of interwar Yugoslav contexts, it is important to acknowledge the very curious nature of such folkloric imagery in which the real and the artificial often collide. *So That Our Fields May Be Fertile*, for example, presents an unusual space. Croatian folk culture is made into an eye-catching spectacle in a meticulously arranged tableau of figures, artifacts, ritual, and landscape. The presence of women of various ages pictured together adds to the sense that this tradition has gone on for generations and will continue for generations. In this mythical, timeless space, Vanka has inserted very real and regionally-specific objects that clash with the artificial. With exacting detail, he replicates the stitching, weaving, headdresses, jewelry, and rituals associated with

regional folk cultures. As the following chapter will explore, this troubling mix of artificiality and reality was one of the main issues that critics had with Vanka's artworks.

As scholars of nationalism argue and this research confirms, the cultural products of nationalism are never "authentic" folk culture itself, but rather a new, invented, constructed, and hybrid culture based in traditional culture to a greater or lesser degree. As Gellner observed:

Nationalism usually conquers in the name of a putative folk culture. Its symbolism is drawn from the healthy, pristine, vigorous life of the peasants, of the *Volk*, the *narod*...If the nationalism prospers it eliminates the alien high culture, but it does not replace it by the old local low culture; it revives, or invents, a local high (literate, specialist-transmitted) culture of its own, though admittedly one which will have some links with the earlier local folk styles and dialects.⁶⁰

For this reason, this study does not deal with "authentic" folk culture or folklore in the traditional sense of the word. I do not claim to provide any special insight into the way that non-elite, rural Croatian populations actually lived their lives during this time period—their language, social behavior, beliefs, or material culture. (Although that's not to say that someone else might not be able to use Vanka's works to glean such insight.) Instead, my research addresses the images and displays themselves and questions how they constructed representations of Croatian folk culture for urban and international consumption and politics. Vanka's artworks and the other works of visual culture analyzed here are best understood as constituting "folklorism" rather than "folk culture" or "folklore." As Hans Moser defined it, folklorism is "second-hand mediation and presentation of folk culture."⁶¹ It is not the culture of non-elite groups in its original form, but rather conscious reuse of that culture often for economic, political, or social agendas. This project deals with *Volkskultur* as historian of German ethnography Hermann Bausinger has conceived it, as having little to do with a real, lower or working class, but rather as a construction

⁶⁰ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 57.

⁶¹ Hans Moser, "Vom Folklorismus in unserer Zeit," *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 58 (1962): 180. Translated in Guntis Šmidchens, "Folklorism Revisited," *Journal of Folklore Research* 36, no. 1 (Jan-Apr 1999).

that mixes “peasant past and middle-class desires.”⁶² As this project will explore, in these constructions the meaning of folk culture was not fixed but rather mutable and changing over time. Thus competing political ideologies all personified their interests in the image of the peasant—imperialists, cosmopolitans, nationalists, and socialists.

The images and exhibitions discussed in this research were constructed ideals of peasant life that had little to do with the hard working conditions and immense poverty and debt endured by much of the rural populations of the interwar Croatian regions. Throughout the interwar period, the economy of the Croatian regions, and Yugoslavia more broadly, remained firmly based in agriculture. In the 1931 Yugoslav census, 78.5 percent of the working population identified themselves as making their living from agriculture or forestry. This was only slightly less than 81.9 percent who identified themselves as such ten years earlier in 1921. By and large this group consisted of peasants, who continued to make up a large majority of the Yugoslav population throughout the interwar period. Only 10 percent of the working population reported working in industrial jobs, primarily for the railroad. The remaining percentage contained a small middle class of professionals, educators, officials, and clerks. The Croatian regions were some of the least industrially developed in interwar Europe.

Peasants in this region had traditionally lived and worked in communal *zadruga* until the mid 1800s. However, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of these had been divided and the average peasant in Croatia owned just a couple acres, far less land than in

⁶² “...ein Konstrukt ‘Volkskultur’ entsteht, in dem sich bäurliche Vergangenheit und bürgerliche Sehnsüchte vermischen.” Hermann Bausinger, “Bürgerlichkeit und Kultur,” in *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jürgen Kocka (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 137. For more on this debate about the relationship between folklore and folklorism see Hermann Bausinger, *Folk Culture in a World of Technology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

other regions of Europe.⁶³ Interwar agrarian reform failed to change this situation and in 1931, 67.8 percent of landowners still owned less than 12 acres, another 29.3 percent less than 50 acres.⁶⁴ This meant they could barely produce enough food to live on, let alone sell goods to pay the taxes, debt, and church dues that were a regular part of rural life in the region. In order to help relieve the burden of poverty, some rural women were forced to work as wet nurses for wealthy urban families, getting paid little for their services.⁶⁵ It was not uncommon for rural men to resort to banditry of local travelers and estates.⁶⁶

In an ethnographic study conducted in 1936, Croatian Rudolf Bićanić described how the peasants he encountered in areas of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia lived in small, crowded, and poorly-constructed homes. According to his account, they spent the majority of their time producing the goods necessary for survival.⁶⁷ The photographs taken during his expedition show peasants hard at work, in only simple, unadorned, and sometimes ready-made clothing. Bićanić insightfully observed, “In the harsh reality of the struggle for existence such essentials as clothing take on a very different appearance from that lent them by the magic spectacles of the ethnographic museum, or the artificial cult of Arcadian peasant costumes.”⁶⁸

⁶³ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 21-24.

⁶⁴ Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 64.

⁶⁵ Adamic, *Cradle of Life*, 5.

⁶⁶ For a fictionalized account about the participation of Vanka's foster father in one of these bandit groups, which eventually led to his execution, see *ibid.*, 62-68.

⁶⁷ Bićanić was an economist by study, and although he was raised in the middle class, he became an active member of Croatian Peasant Party. He firmly believed in the economic importance of cottage industries for peasants writing, “If our peasant could clothe himself independently of industrial manufacture, it would strengthen his economic position that he could regulate the price of his produce... That is why we consider the question of peasant clothing one of the most important questions of the peasant economic policy.” Rudolf Bićanić, Joel Martin Halpern, and Elinor Murray Despalatović, *How the People Live: Life in the Passive Regions (Peasant Life in Southwestern Croatia, Bosnia, and Hercegovina, Yugoslavia in 1935)*, trans. Stephen Clissold (1941), Research report, Department of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts (Amherst: Dept. of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts, 1981), 70.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

In addition to creating the false impression that peasants lived ideal lives without struggle, early twentieth-century displays and images of folk culture might also mislead contemporary viewers to think that Central and Eastern European peripheral metropolises were still stuck in a premodern state of development. In fact, Zagreb was no Arcadian idyll. Between 1900 and the 1930s the population of Zagreb grew from approximately 40,000 to around 200,000 with a major influx of people from the surrounding rural communities.⁶⁹ Peasants were a common sight in early twentieth-century Zagreb, especially in the market, but all the trappings of a modern city were also clearly visible—soaring power lines, new forms of transportation, tourism, and modern design. Indeed, in mass media, folk imagery often competed with images of swift automobiles and electric radio antennas during the 1920s and early 1930s—the peasant at times creating a contrasting highlight to the modernity of these new objects.

The artificiality of many of Vanka's folkloric artworks seems to clash with the conditions in which rural populations lived in the interwar period. It raises the question, in what way are Vanka's works real? That is one of the main questions with which this project will grapple—what is the relationship of Vanka's works to the reality of the political and social life of interwar Yugoslavia and of interwar Yugoslav emigrants? On a very basic level, evidence will suggest that many of Vanka's folkloric paintings are based on real-life folk dress, rituals, and art. However, even more important than these real-life sources is the fact that Vanka's works confronted a real social problem—the politically and economically underrepresented rural population.

⁶⁹ Eve Blau and Ivan Rupnik, *Project Zagreb: Transition as Condition, Strategy, Practice* (Barcelona: Actar, 2007).

1.5 VANKA'S BIOGRAPHY

Since little has been published about Vanka in English, especially about his career before he immigrated to the United States, it is important to outline the major events in Vanka's life and career. This outline provides a framework that will be filled in in more depth in the following chapters, which will take a more direct look at certain artworks and periods of Vanka's life.

Vanka was born in Zagreb on 11 May 1889 as an illegitimate child of nobility.⁷⁰ His mother appears to have been a noblewoman named Elizabeth von Furstenberg.⁷¹ According to Adamic, Vanka knew who his birth mother was, but met her in person only once as an adult. The identity of his father remained a more closely guarded secret. After his birth, a midwife placed Vanka in the care of a Zagorje peasant woman, Dora Jugova, who was provided monetary payment and perhaps livestock in exchange for raising Vanka alongside her own children.⁷² Jugova was required to bring the young Vanka to Zagreb once a year to have his photo taken so that it could be sent to his birth family as evidence that he was still alive and healthy. This arrangement lasted until Vanka was about eight years of age. At this point, someone from the maternal side of his family apparently removed him from the Jugova family, placed him as the

⁷⁰ This is why Vanka has a nonstandard, unique surname. Presumably it was an invented name, referencing the adverb *van* meaning "out," "outside," or "abroad." The name highlighted Vanka's outsider status as both an illegitimate child and someone who presumably did not have biological Croat ancestry. Most likely his parentage was Czech. Adamic wrote, "He was born in Zagreb, but, I gathered, was not a Croat." Adamic, *My America*, 156.

⁷¹ That Vanka's mother was a woman of the von Furstenberg family is substantiated by several items in the Vanka-Brasko Family Archive, Rushland, Pennsylvania including a nineteenth-century photograph of a young woman labeled as Elizabeth von Furstenberg by Margeret Vanka Stetten, and an account in Margeret Vanka's diary that speaks of how they "coincidentally" encountered a von Furstenberg woman, presumably one of Vanka's aunts, at a hotel on Korčula in spring of 1935. Vanka also appears to have some relation to the Salm noble family indicated by several items in the family archive with the Salm family seal on them. Whether it is a maternal or paternal relation is unclear, but some have speculated that Vanka's father was the Czech Count zu Salm (Furstbischof Salm). Many thanks to Marya Halderman for bringing my attention to this material.

⁷² Adamic claimed the location of Vanka's wet nurse was in Kupljenovo, just on the other side of Medvednica Mountain from Zagreb. Adamic, *My America*, 166.

head of a small estate, and began educating him in a manner befitting a member of the late Habsburg nobility.

The rough details of Vanka's early childhood are substantiated by a number of sources. First, the artist's family owns some of these yearly photographs of Vanka with Dora Jugova. In addition, in a 1923 article by art historian and critic Antun Jiroušek about Vanka written before his immigration to the United States mentions his foster upbringing, as do many English-language articles published after his immigration.⁷³ Finally, Adamic's 1937 *Cradle of Life*, the first half of which is heavily based on Vanka's early biography, goes into great detail about these circumstances.⁷⁴ In *Cradle of Life*, Adamic depicted the main character, Rudo Stanka (rhyming with Makso/Maxo Vanka), as the illegitimate child of Rudolf of Habsburg—the son of Franz Joseph and the Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary who committed suicide in 1889. Although the dates of Vanka's birth make such a scenario possible, in real life Vanka was probably the child of lower ranking nobility. Likely Adamic featured Crown Prince Rudolf in his story because he wanted to paint a vivid picture of the social and political circumstances of the late Habsburg Monarchy and the problems presented to the Empire by Slavic nationalism. Adamic presents

⁷³ Jiroušek, "Naše slike."

⁷⁴ Adamic's novel is a fictionalized account, but the numerous connections that can be drawn between the story and the content of Vanka's artworks suggest that it drew heavily on Vanka's recollections of his childhood. I believe the first half can provide insight into how Vanka understood the economic plight of peasants in the Croatian regions before World War I. However, the book must also be read with an understanding that the last section of the novel is more of an autobiographical account of Adamic's own political awakening and call to action. Tellingly, in the novel the main character crushes his hand and thus must relinquish his hopes of becoming an artist and instead takes up writing as his tool of resistance instead. I interpret this not only as a switch to Adamic's biography but also as Adamic's ultimate dismissal of Vanka's artwork, which he did not find particularly visually stimulating; he was instead attracted to Vanka's "mystic" qualities. Adamic openly admitted in his memoirs *My America* that Vanka "interested me less as an artist than as a person." While Adamic's narrative of Vanka's life added excitement and mystery, the author ultimately obscured the more complex social and national significance of the artist's work. Adamic, *My America*, 157.

According to a version of the "Author's Notes and Acknowledgment" included in the final holograph for *Cradle of Life*, a crossed out sentence indicated that Adamic originally intended to create a whole series of books based on Vanka's life and providing an exploration of the political and social conditions of interwar Yugoslavia. Louis Adamic Papers, Princeton Library, CO246 / Box I A Books: Cradle of Life, Folder 6: Cradle of Life. TMs w/ Holograph Corrections

Rudolf as the only member of the royal family who may have found a progressive solution to the “Slavic question” in the Habsburg Empire, and thus Stanka/Vanka, it is implied, has inherited this task. The novel closes the day before the fateful assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, and the Yugoslavism that permeates the last section of the novel is upheld as the solution that will come to the region in the interwar period.⁷⁵ In Adamic’s novel he wrote of the noble estate from Rudo Stanka’s perspective:

One-third of the tenants’ harvest went to them, two-thirds to the castle. This system was in effect when I arrived, and continued years afterward; indeed, till the very end of the Hapsburg monarchy. Feudalism had begun to break up a century before, but in some sections of Croatia, as elsewhere in the Empire, it hung on, holding multitudes of peasants in its death grip. Without wish or fault on my part, I was among the last of its beneficiaries....⁷⁶

What is clear from the facts of Vanka’s upbringing and from Adamic’s version of events is that Vanka’s experiences—both growing up in an impoverished rural home and then living on an estate farmed and funded by peasants—provided Vanka with an intimate knowledge of both folk culture and the harsh conditions under which the rural lower classes lived in the late Habsburg Monarchy.

After completing gymnasium around 1908, Vanka began training under the painter Bela Čikoš Sesija at the College for Arts and Crafts (*Viša škola za umjetnost i umjetni obrt*) in Zagreb.⁷⁷ Čikoš Sesija was a symbolist who specialized in painting dark and dramatic literary

⁷⁵ “....I read in the newspapers that Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand is to be in Sarajevo tomorrow, and there to be officially received—on *Vidov dan*!...All of which, obviously, is intended to be a high-handed gesture against the rising pro-Serbian and Yugoslav feeling in Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia—perhaps more: an imperialistic threat at Serbia.” Adamic, *Cradle of Life*, 466.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁷⁷ Čikoš Sesija and artist Menci Clement Crnčić founded a private school of fine and applied arts in 1903. Zagreb students could already study applied arts with an emphasis on industry at the School of Art and Craft (*Škola za Umjetnost i Obrt*) founded by Izidor Kršnjavi’s Art Association in 1882, but Čikoš Sesija’s private school was focused on fine arts. The private school became a state-assisted college (*viša škola*) in 1907, at which Vanka began teaching in 1920. A year later in 1921 it would become the Zagreb Art Academy. Elizabeth Clegg, *Art, Design, and Architecture in Central Europe, 1890-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 135.

scenes and was one of the leading early twentieth-century painters in Croatia. He had exhibited his paintings in the Hrvatski Salon of 1898 alongside Vlaho Bukovac and Robert Frangeš Mihanović in what essentially constituted Zagreb's secession movement. Croatian art historian Grgo Gamulin has written that more than any other student, Vanka truly inherited Čikoš Sesija's approach to art making, which was reflected in Vanka's carefully arranged compositions and reliance on mythic and literary subject matter in many of his works.⁷⁸ With the support of Čikoš Sesija and the Yugoslav government, Vanka continued his studies at the Royal Academy of Beaux Arts in Brussels with symbolist painters Jean Delville and Constant Montald from 1911 to 1914. Delville supposedly favored Vanka, introducing him to the art societies "Les Idealistes" and "Peintres des idées et figures" with whom Vanka exhibited.⁷⁹ He also undertook study trips to Amsterdam, Paris, and London to study old master painting. Vanka's studies with symbolists in Zagreb and Brussels placed him outside the standard path of the leading Croatian avant-garde artists of his generation who studied in Vienna and Munich and often spent several years in Paris observing the latest artistic trends. The careers of Vanka's leading contemporaries Miroslav Kraljević and Ljubo Babić followed this path.

Vanka stayed in Belgium for a short period after the outbreak of World War I serving in the Belgian Red Cross before he was forced to evacuate. As Adamic described,

At the war's outbreak in 1914, Maxo was twenty-five, officially an Austrian, and, as such, internable in Belgium as an enemy; but with Queen Elizabeth's great influence he was made an officer in the Belgian Red Cross, in which capacity he witnessed the German conquest of Belgium.⁸⁰

Seven years after completing his studies, Vanka began teaching at Zagreb Academy of Art in 1920 and taught there until his emigration to the United States in 1934.

⁷⁸ Gamulin, "Maksimilijan Vanka," 183.

⁷⁹ Vladimir Lunaček, "Naši najmladji umjetnici," *Savremenik* IX (1914): 435.

⁸⁰ Adamic, *My America*, 167.

During his career in Zagreb, which spanned the roughly two decades from 1913 to 1934, Vanka had three major solo exhibitions in prominent Zagreb exhibition spaces. In November 1915, he had his first solo exhibition in Salon Ullrich in which he exhibited the two large-scale folkloric works that he had completed so far in his career—*Marija Bistrica* (1915) and a reproduction of *The Suppliants* (*Proštenjari*, 1913)—alongside portraits, watercolor rural landscapes, and studies from the Netherlands.⁸¹ The reactions to this initial exhibition were varied. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, many critics initially felt ambivalent towards the style of his folkloric works, but saw in him a great watercolorist and landscape artist.

Following that, Vanka did not hold a solo exhibition for over a decade but participated regularly in important group exhibitions and artistic projects that will be discussed in Chapter 4. The following is not an exhaustive list, but includes the highlights. From about 1912 to 1922 he exhibited every few years in group exhibitions of the Zagreb chapter of Lada, a Yugoslav artist organization. His painting *Our Mothers* (*Naše majke 1914.-1918*, c. 1918-1919) was included in the 1919 *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves* planned to coincide with the Paris Peace Conference. He took part in an ethnographic expedition conducted by Zagreb's Etnografski muzej (Ethnographic Museum) in 1923 in the Kupa River Valley south of Zagreb. Elements of the folk culture he observed on that trip appeared in the sets and costumes he designed for Krešimir Baranović's 1924 nationalist ballet *The Gingerbread Heart* (*Licitarsko srce*) staged at the Croatian National Theater in Zagreb. While working on the production, Vanka met the ballerina Mia Slavenska for whom he would also design folkloric costumes later in the United

⁸¹ *Intimna izložba: Maksimilijan Vanka* (Zagreb: Salon Ullrich, 1915). Exhibition catalogs for all of Vanka's solo exhibitions and many of his group exhibitions are located in the holdings of the Archive of Fine Arts (Arhiv za likovne umjetnosti), and available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti. Salon Ullrich was a small gallery opened in 1909 that specialized in showing young emerging artists. It was one of the only galleries to remain open during World War I. Clegg, *Art, Design, and Architecture in Central Europe*, 220.

States. He exhibited his designs for the scenography at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris in 1925. In late 1928, Vanka joined three artists—Ljubo Babić, Vladimir Becić, and Jerolim Miše—in a group exhibition. The three would go on to found one of the most influential artist groups of the interwar period, *Grupa trojice* (Group of Three), but Vanka left the group after one exhibition for reasons that have not been documented.

Vanka did not have his second solo exhibition until March 1930 when he returned to Galerija Ullrich.⁸² The folkloric works exhibited in 1930, including *Spell Against Hail* (*Copranga protiv tuči*, c. 1930) and *Bistrice Poor* (*Bistrički bogci*, c. 1930), moved away from the exacting ethnographic specificity of his early folkloric works and towards a more painterly and expressive style. In 1932 he painted a set of murals in the popular *Gradski podrum* (City Tavern) in a naive style adopted from the young painters with whom he collaborated, all associated with the leftist artists group *Zemlja* (Earth).

In 1931, Vanka was reunited with a young American Jewish woman to whom he had given art lessons in the summer of 1926, Margaret Stetten (1907-1997), the daughter of Manhattan surgeon DeWitt Stetten. Despite Vanka's early misgiving, Margaret decided to marry Vanka and support his artistic career. The wedding took place on the island of Korčula in 1931, and the two had a daughter, named Peggy, a year later. In 1932, Vanka met the Slovenian-American writer Adamic while he was visiting Yugoslavia on a Guggenheim fellowship, and the two became close friends. Margaret enlisted Adamic's help in convincing Vanka to leave Zagreb and emigrate to the United States. As the threat of another war grew in Europe, Vanka agreed to leave Croatia in the fall of 1934. Before he left for the United States, Vanka held a farewell

⁸² *Maksimilijan Vanka: MCMXXX Galerija Ullrich, 17.-27. III.* (Zagreb: Galerija Ullrich, 1930).

exhibition of 72 works in the Zagreb Umjetnički paviljon (Art Pavilion) in April 1934.⁸³ In this large hall there was room to debut one new folkloric work, *Croatian Magic* (*Copranje (Janica si želi Štefeka z mustači)*, c. 1933) alongside many of his major folkloric works of the previous two decades. He told one local magazine that he would work one to two years in the United States.⁸⁴

During his first year in the United States, Vanka had solo exhibitions at the Marie Sterner Galleries in New York City November to December 1934 and at the Wunderly Brothers Gallery in Pittsburgh in May 1935.⁸⁵ American critics perceived Vanka as a traditionalist who aimed to present the everyday life of his Slavic homeland. Among his folkloric works *Spell Against Hail* and *Croatian Magic* were shown. In the United States Vanka's art took a notable social realist turn. He became fascinated by the scenes of everyday urban life, which he documented in drawings in New York and in other cities that he traveled to while accompanying Adamic on his speaking tours.

Members of the St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church located just across the river from downtown Pittsburgh in Millvale, Pennsylvania, saw the Wunderly Brothers Gallery exhibition and invited Vanka in 1937 to create a set of murals in their church. He returned in 1941 to cover the remaining space with murals. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the Millvale Murals are the culmination of Vanka's folkloric works. After painting the murals, he taught locally in Bucks County near the farmhouse where he and Margaret settled in 1941, but he worked mostly in isolation in his barn studio. He and Margaret traveled extensively, which Vanka documented in a

⁸³ *Maksimilijan Vanka* (Zagreb: Tisak Zaklade Tiskare Narodnih Novina u Zagrebu, 1934).

⁸⁴ "Oproštajna Izložba Maksimilijana Vanke," *Svijet* 9, no. 14 (31 March 1934): 272. The most important reviews of this farewell exhibition are Šrepel, "Maksimilijan Vanka (uz kolektivnu izložbu u Umjetničkom paviljonu)."; Hergešić, "Maksimilijan Vanka – prigodom izložbe u Umjetničkom paviljonu."

⁸⁵ *Vanka: November 26 - December 8, 1934* (New York City: Marie Sterner Galleries, 1934). This exhibition catalog can be viewed in the Maksimilijan Vanka Papers, Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora, HAZU. An invitation for the Wunderly Brothers exhibition in Pittsburgh exists in the holdings of the Archive of Fine Arts (Arhiv za likovne umjetnosti), but not a brochure listing the artworks on display.

series of ethnographic watercolors, but Vanka never returned to Yugoslavia after the start of World War II. He died on 2 February 1963 while swimming off the coast of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.

1.6 CHAPTER LAYOUT

Vanka's work serves to tie together this project's examination of the ways in which images of Croatian folk culture were used in various contexts to visualize competing early twentieth-century Central European identities. Vanka began producing paintings of peasants from Central Croatia (the region around Zagreb) in 1913. On the eve of World War I, Central Croatia was a loyal part of the Habsburg Monarchy with a defiant relationship to Budapest, under whose control it remained in the Dual Monarchy. In Chapter 2, I trace where Croatian folk art was collected and displayed in the late Habsburg Empire and how that changed in interwar Yugoslavia. I ask what narratives were created with folk culture in exhibition spaces, what meaning folk culture took on in those narratives, and what connections Vanka had with these various institutions. I use this institutional history to shed light on the reception of Vanka's early folkloric works by revealing that Vanka's art was not interpreted as nationalist until museum displays began mobilizing folk culture in support of nationalism.

The political unification of South Slavs into a new Yugoslav state after World War I increased the urgency of the "Croatian question" about the Croatian region's political sovereignty and would actually work to intensify Croatian nationalism rather than quell it. This boosted the popularity of the HSS and resulted in a corresponding surge of folkloric imagery that included works by Vanka. In Chapter 3, the relationship between interwar Yugoslavian politics

and mass media images of Croatian folk culture is examined. It focuses on illustrations and articles in the art-deco publication *Svijet* and the women's magazine *Ženski List*, both of which featured Vanka's works at various points. I analyze the change in this imagery following the tumultuous political events of 1928 and the subsequent establishment of a dictatorship in interwar Yugoslavia, as the romanticized illustrations of folk culture in the late 1920s gave way to social-realist imagery of struggling peasants in the 1930s. Vanka's imagery in these magazines avoided defining Croatia's geopolitical borders and instead encouraged women to incorporate folk culture into their everyday lives.

Throughout the early twentieth century, modern Croatian artists were using images of Croatian folk culture to imagine competing identities. Chapter 4 describes Vanka's connections to other prominent interwar Croatian academic and avant-garde artists working with images of peasants. It will compare the artworks and writings of Vanka to three other leading artists of the period—Ivan Meštrović, Ljubo Babić, and Krsto Hegedušić. These artists all worked with folkloric imagery but did so in ways that reveals a broad political spectrum of responses to the "Croatian question." Vanka's work serves as the starting point for discussing divergent attempts to create a distinctly Croatian modern art and its tension with attempts to foster a unified Yugoslav art.

After immigrating to the United States in 1934, Vanka ended his run of folkloric works in the murals of a Croatian immigrant working-class church in Millvale in 1937 and 1941 discussed in Chapter 5. In the 1937 set of murals, Vanka explored how to visualize American immigrant identity. In contrast, the 1941 murals—completed in the months following the foundation of the fascist Independent State of Croatia—conveyed a strong antifascist and antiwar message that called for political freedom for the Yugoslav regions.

During the thirty-year segment of his career during which Vanka regularly painted images of Croatian folk culture, from 1913 to 1941, the “Croatian question” about the region’s national sovereignty remained without a fixed answer. Vanka’s works and those of his contemporaries showed repeated attempts to use the figure of the peasant to suggest changing and developing answers to the question of how to give Croatians political power. The way in which Vanka’s works were composed and exhibited reveal that Vanka considered folk culture to be a living, changing culture, and that he was more concerned with social reform than with bringing Croatia’s political borders in line with its imagined cultural borders.

This next chapter launches this exploration by examining the role of museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as powerful modernizing institutions capable of constructing modern identities through displays of folk culture. Chapter 2 will examine how the reception of Vanka’s works underwent a change as displays of folk culture moved from museums of applied arts in the late Habsburg Empire to ethnographic museums in interwar Yugoslavia.

2.0 VANKA'S EARLY FOLKLORIC PAINTINGS AND THE DISPLAY OF CROATIAN FOLK CULTURE

In 1913, while on break from his studies at the Royal Academy of Beaux Arts in Brussels, Vanka returned home to Zagreb and began work on his first major painting portraying local folk culture.⁸⁶ *Proštenjari*, best translated as *The Suppliants*, depicted a group of peasant men and women gathered around a brightly decorated outdoor altar on a religious feast day. A gilded Madonna and Christ icon sits atop the altar and the foreground is scattered with votive offerings of tall candles, red-iced gingerbread hearts, and an abundance of harvested gourds. Many of the figures face the centrally located altar with their backs to the viewer. More than the religious experience of these peasants, the material objects—the embroidered linen folk dress, the altar, and the votive gifts depicted in careful detail—become the subject of this painting. The men's blue waistcoats embroidered in red and the women's fur-lined vests and red handkerchiefs are replicas of those worn in the villages of Gračani and Šestina in the foothills of the Medvednica mountain that rises above Zagreb depicted in ethnographic detail. Only one young girl in the upper right appears to reciprocate the voyeuristic gaze of the viewer on this public but intimate scene.

⁸⁶ The anecdote about Vanka's visit home comes from Andrija Milčinović, "Dešković i Vanka," *Savremenik* VIII (1913): 751.

Vanka returned with *Proštenjari* to Brussels, where it was exhibited at the Exposition générale des beaux-arts Salon Triennal in Brussels in 1913 to 1914.⁸⁷ In a note that Vanka penned on a postcard with a color reproduction of the painting on 22 August 1914, he described how the painting was supposed to convey to foreigners “the beauty of our folk [nation] and of its custom—[it is] about the homeland...”⁸⁸ The Croatian folk imagery was well received in Brussels and the painting was awarded the gold medal of King Albert.⁸⁹

Despite Vanka’s assertion about the didactic content of the work, at the time Zagreb’s critics did not perceive the painting as nationalist or even as part of dominate Croatian art currents. Although the original painting was displayed in Brussels and supposedly remained abroad, the image was also well known in Zagreb.⁹⁰ The work was primarily known to the public through its reproduction as a color postcard, like the one on which Vanka’s note appears.⁹¹ A black-and-white reproduction of the painting appeared in the popular Zagreb cultural journal *Savremenik* at the time of its original exhibition.⁹² Early reviews of Vanka’s works in Zagreb, appearing before and after World War I, consistently refer to *Proštenjari* as Vanka’s first

⁸⁷ According to the catalog the painting was originally exhibited under the French title *Fête de la Madone en Croatie* (*Feast of Our Lady in Croatia*). Salon Triennal: Exposition Générale des Beaux-Arts (Brussels: Impr. de C. Lelong, 1914), <https://archive.org/details/expositiongen1914expo>, 71.

⁸⁸ The Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian word “*narod*” can be translated both as “nation” and “folk.” Translations are my own except when otherwise noted., This postcard is in my possession.

⁸⁹ Vladimir Lunaček, “Naši najmladji umjetnici,” *Savremenik* IX (1914): 436.

⁹⁰ It is not clear if the painting *Proštenjari* is still extant. Croatian art historian Snježana Pintarić claimed it was bought by a museum of modern art in Brussels, but my contact with the Musée Modern Museum has no record of its acquisition. Pintarić, ed., *Maksimilijan Vanka: Portreti*. In 1923, art historian and critic Antun Jiroušek claimed the painting was purchased by a gallery in Stuttgart after its exhibition in Brussels. Antun Jiroušek, “Naše slike,” *Vijenac* 18, no. 6 (1923): 118. No evidence suggests that the original is located in Croatia, but a reproduction created for the solo exhibition “Intimna izložba: Maksimilijan Vanka” held at Zagreb’s Salon Ullrich in November 1915 may still reside in Zagreb.

⁹¹ Art historian and ethnographer Antun Jiroušek made this claim a decade later in 1923, so the postcard likely remained in print for some time. Jiroušek, “Naše slike,” 118.

⁹² Milčinović, “Dešković i Vanka,” 701.

successful large-scale oil painting.⁹³ Though reviews were generally positive, critics had little to say about the distinctive Croatian folk culture displayed within the work. Surprisingly, they perceived the work as too foreign stylistically. Specifically, they criticized how the work depended too much on the dark palettes and the cluttered and artificial compositions of Spanish artists Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945) and brothers Ramón de Zubiaurre (1882-1969) and Valentín de Zubiaurre (1879-1963).⁹⁴ Kosta Strajnić observed that Vanka belonged neither to the current of young Croatian artists working in the mode of French models (most prominent among them was Miroslav Kraljević) nor to the current working with Yugoslav mythology in the vein of famed Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović. Rather, Vanka alone belonged to a third Spanish direction, and in Strajnić's opinion his imitations of these Spanish artists were negatively affecting his work.

In too great of love for his Spanish models, he forgets that the landscape of Zagorje could not stand the colors of the Spanish regions, and that the character of our people from Šestina does not agree with the attitudes/positions of the Zubiaurre figures. Since his imitation is more external than internal, he often falls into an uncomfortable accumulation of objects, which do not have any relationship with the content. Therefore, his religious compositions function more with foreign artificiality than with direct honesty.⁹⁵

⁹³ In the view of late twentieth-century Croatian art historian Grgo Gamulin, *Proštenjari* played a decisively negative role in Vanka's career. The painting's success caused Vanka to focus on narrative regionalism in his work and thus to be passed over by the Croatian avant-garde. "This burden of ethnographic or even ethnological fabulosity dragged to the end. It needs to be separated from the excellent big artworks in watercolor.." Grgo Gamulin, "Maksimilijan Vanka," in *Hrvatsko slikarstvo XX. stoljeća* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1997), 184.

⁹⁴ Vanka may have first encountered Zuloaga and Valentín de Zubiaurre's work in Brussels. The Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels acquired several of Zuloaga's pieces from the 1900 Salon de La Libre Esthétique including *La veille de la course de taureaux* (*The Day Before the Running of the Bulls*, 1898). Vanka's folkloric works bear a resemblance to this work in terms of attention to sartorial detail and balanced multi-figure compositions. Working out of Madrid and Paris, Zuloaga's work was well known in Europe from around 1900 to the start of World War I. Valentín de Zubiaurre exhibited in the 1910 Exhibition Universelle held in Brussels the year before Vanka arrived. Vanka's folkloric works bear a striking resemblance to de Zubiaurre's works depicting folk culture. For example, Vanka's *Marija Bistrica* (c. 1915) and de Zubiaurre's *For the Victims of the Sea* (1914, Bilbao Fine Arts Museum) both depict rural religious ceremonies taking place at outdoor altars. The use of the background as an equally important part of the narrative space of the painting is carried over from Valentín de Zubiaurre's work as well.

⁹⁵ "U prevelikoj ljubavi za svoje španjolske uzore, on zaboravlja da pejzaž Zagorja nikako ne podnosi boje španjolskih krajeva, i da se karakter naših Šestinčana nikako ne slaže sa stavovima Zubiaurrinih figura. Pošto je njegovo podražavanje više spoljašnje nego unutrašnje, on često zapada u neugodno nagomilavanje predmeta, koji

In all the reviews before and during the war, Andrija Milčinović, Izidor Kršnjavi, and Vladimir Lunaček were wary of these overpowering “foreign influences.”⁹⁶ It is clear that for these critics in the midst of the war, creating a distinctly Croatian modern art was a priority. However, this was to be achieved not simply by filling images with Croatian folkloric content, but rather by creating a national art that had a distinct aesthetic style.

As discussed in the previous chapter, folkloric works by Vanka hang today in important spaces of Croatian national imagining where they operate as national symbols. However, the reception of Vanka’s major early works reveals that although the works dealt with specifically Croatian folk culture, they were not considered nationalist by viewers before and during World War I. The evidence discussed in this chapter presents a challenge to the current reception of Vanka’s folkloric works as straightforwardly Croatian nationalist. Beyond those Spanish models already mentioned, there was another influence on Vanka’s work and on Vanka’s audience that was perhaps so obvious to contemporary critics that it was not worth mentioning. Namely, Vanka’s and his audience’s understanding of folk culture and folk art was rooted in the Austro-Hungarian foundation of the fields of applied arts and ethnography, and their universalizing approach to the Empire’s folk cultures.

nemaju nikakve veze sa sadržajem. Radi toga, njegove religiozne kompozicije djeluju više stranom izvještačenošću nego neposrednom iskrenošću.” Kosta Strajnić, "Mladja umjetnička generacija," *Savremenik* X, no. 11 and 12 (1915): 428-29.

⁹⁶ Andrija Milčinović, "Dešković i Vanka," *ibid.* VIII (1913); Izidor Kršnjavi, "Izložba Maksimilijana Vanke," *Narodne Novine*, 13 November 1915; Vladimir Lunaček, "Iz umjetničkoga svijeta: Maksimilijan Vanka," *Savremenik* X, no. 11 and 12 (1915). This view of Vanka's work as “Hispanic” has even carried over from these reviews into recent Croatian art history. Zdenko Tonković wrote about Vanka that he was “wegen seines von Ignacio Zuloaga stark beeinflussten Folklorismus als ein Beispiel das bei uns ungewöhnlicher Hispanismus...” In actuality, as Tonković reports, many of Vanka’s contemporary Croatian artists (including Ljubo Babić and the Group of Three) were deeply influenced by Spanish models including Francisco de Zubaran, Francisco Goya, and Diego Velazquez. However, Vanka was perceived as uncritically using the foreign model, rather than adapting it to the Croatian context. In Igor Zidić, ed., *Gruppe der Drei, Grupa trojice: 1929-1935* (Zagreb: Kulturam der Landeshauptstadt Wiesbaden and Moderna Galerija, Zagreb, 1996), 12.

The main body of Vanka's folkloric works, painted in the nearly three decades between 1913 and 1941, overlapped with a period of transition for the collection and display of folk culture from the Croatian regions. Up until 1918 the regions that constitute Croatia today—Central Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia—were part of the Habsburg Monarchy. In the late Habsburg Monarchy, the earliest bourgeois, economic, and cosmopolitan interests in folk arts—or “cottage industry” as it was often called in that context—were expressed primarily in new museums of applied arts founded in the late nineteenth-century and in some newly emerging works of ethnography. Applied arts reformers treated folk arts as living craft and used it to promote “good taste” among the middle class. The early Austrian ethnographic works cultivated a universalizing approach to the many ethnic groups that made up the empire by looking for shared traits just as often as differences. Within the careful political balancing act that was the Dual Monarchy, Croatian folk culture was used as one component of a larger attempt to visualize imperial unity out of the variety of folk cultures that made up the empire. After World War I, folk culture was treated less frequently as living culture. Croatian nationalists stepped up their efforts to systematically record and classify the national qualities of “authentic” peasant culture in ethnographic displays and museums before it disappeared forever. In the interwar period, the Croatian lands became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and founded their own Etnografski muzej (Ethnographic Museum) in Zagreb that instituted new professional, scientific approaches to collecting and displaying folk culture. This transition from the applied arts approach to folk culture as economic good to the ethnographic approach to folk culture as nationalist symbol took place unevenly in Croatia's largely rural and unindustrialized regions.

Vanka was a liminal figure. He was raised in the Habsburg Monarchy and came of age right before the beginning of the Great War, but spent the first 15 years of his career in the newly

founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. He took part in both of these approaches to Croatian folk culture—both applied arts reform and nationalist ethnographic research. In 1923, he participated in an ethnographic expedition to collect and record disappearing folk culture organized by the Zagreb Etnografski muzej. At the same time, Vanka still saw folk culture as a viable way to support the economic development of rural populations. As late as 1928, Vanka was helping organize one of the last exhibitions promoting the economic importance of “cottage industry.” Vanka would never quite fit in this emerging nation-based ethnography. His early depictions of village customs and their accompanying folk dress, copied in great detail—down to the individual stitches—earned him the nickname the “embroiderer” among his fellow artists, notably not the label “ethnographer.”⁹⁷ In the Croatian lands, where there was little industrialization, this applied arts approach to folk art lingered well into the interwar period, overlapping with the development of the new Ethnographic Museum. Both the ethnographic expedition and the exhibition will be discussed in this chapter.

Museums and exhibitions have incredible imaginative power for identity, and Vanka’s work was intertwined with the narratives created by these displays of folk culture. The history of these displays and interpretations begins to reveal how twentieth-century Habsburg, Yugoslav, and Croatian identities were visually imagined. In the 1920s, as folk art from the Croatian lands shifted in significance from cosmopolitan, economic good to authentic source of national content so too do the interpretations of Vanka’s folkloric works shift. Examining Vanka’s artworks and their reception illuminates the changing meaning that folk culture acquired through these displays and exhibitions. However, this analysis does not claim to be a complete history of the exhibition of Croatian folk culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I do not

⁹⁷ V, “Ausstellung Maksimilijan Vanka,” *Morgenblatt*, 16 March 1930.

consider that to be within the scope of this project. Instead I have chosen representative institutions, events, and figures, most of which have connections with Vanka, in order to give an idea of the changing exhibition spaces, motivations, and meanings ascribed to collecting Croatian folk culture during this period.

The history of museums and exhibitions vis-à-vis politics and identity is an area of research that has flourished since the 1990s. Works like Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach's "The Universal Survey Museum," and especially Tony Bennet's 1995 book *The Birth of the Museum* served as the impetus for re-inspecting the politics of the exhibition space.⁹⁸ Duncan and Wallach explored how, "Absorbing more manual and imaginative labor than any other type of architecture, the museum affirms the power and social authority of a patron class."⁹⁹ Bennet examined how the nineteenth-century governments of England and France harnessed the power of museums by using hierarchical displays to legitimize imperialism and colonialism. Bennet's account spurred a valuable critical analysis of museums in both their current and historical states, but his model has also been rightly criticized for ignoring the agency both of viewers and of local museums and exhibitions to create dialogue and alternative narratives. Turning to Central Europe, scholars like Glenn Penny, for example, have examined the ways in which early ethnographic museums in imperial Germany were initially motivated not by colonialism or nationalism, but rather by a scientific universalizing humanism and civic desires to be cosmopolitan.¹⁰⁰ Penny's analysis of alternative museum motivations is especially helpful for considering the complicated and carefully balanced role of museums in the Habsburg Monarchy

⁹⁸ Tony Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995). See also his earlier essay, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Left Review* 4 (1988): 73-102. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3, no. 4 (1980).

⁹⁹ Duncan and Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," 449.

¹⁰⁰ H. Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

and its successor states. Like Penny's study, this historical analysis of displays of Croatian folk culture also reveals a transition from museums driven by a desire to be cosmopolitan to museums increasingly driven by ethnic nationalisms.

Research into the history of museums and exhibitions in the Dual Monarchy and its successor states has emerged more recently. Following Bennet's narrative, the central Austrian government attempted to use museums and exhibitions to consolidate the unity of the Habsburg Empire, or, at least, what Matthew Rampley, Diana Reynolds Cordileone, and others scholars working on the history of applied arts in the Dual Monarchy have referred to as a Habsburg policy of "unity in diversity."¹⁰¹ However, museums in the various centers of the Empire and its successor states also became places for legitimizing local claims for national autonomy. As Matthew Rampley recently wrote in the introduction to an issue of *Centropa* dedicated to the topic,

Far from acting as an instrument of the centralized state, museums often functioned as a means for local social, political and cultural elites to challenge official narratives. As such, they frequently reflected the complex political dynamics of the Habsburg Empire, in which a weak central government sought either to trade off the conflicting claims of differing minorities against one another or to satisfy the demands without making too many concessions.¹⁰²

While several volumes have already been published on the history of Viennese museums, more research is needed on institutions in the other centers throughout the empire and the relationship between those institutions.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Matthew Rampley, "Introduction: Museology in Central Europe," *Centropa* 12, no. 2 (2012): 108; Diana Reynolds Cordileone, "The Austrian Museum for Art and Industry: Historicism and National Identity in Vienna 1863-1900," *Austrian Studies* 16 (2008); Rebecca Houze, "At the Forefront of a Newly Emerging Profession? Ethnography, Education and the Exhibition of Women's Needlework in Austria-Hungary in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 1 (2008).

¹⁰² Rampley, "Introduction: Museology in Central Europe."

¹⁰³ In particular see Peter Noever, ed., *Kunst und Industrie: Die Anfänge des Museums für Angewandte Kunst Wien* (Ostfildern-Ruit: MAK Vienna / Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000).

The historical study of Croatian museums and exhibitions is also a growing topic. Short histories of various institutions including the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt (Museum of Arts and Crafts) and the Etnografski muzej (Ethnographic Museum) have been published on the anniversaries and milestones of these institutions.¹⁰⁴ Several Croatian scholars have gone deeper, adopting contemporary critical approaches to museum history. Vjera Bonifačić, now a professor in the Faculty of Textile Technology at the University of Zagreb, documented the professionalization of the field of ethnography and the canonization of “authentic” folk textiles in early twentieth-century Croatia in her dissertation and a series of articles with an eye towards examining the construction of national and supranational identity.¹⁰⁵ Aleksandra Muraj, a longtime member of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, actively researched the history of ethnography in Croatia throughout her career.¹⁰⁶ One of her studies even analyzes the 1923 ethnographic expedition in which Vanka participated.¹⁰⁷ This project builds on Bonifačić and Muraj’s research on the changing meaning of folk culture in the early twentieth-century Croatian regions. Looking at the reception of Vanka’s artwork reveals how the changing meaning of folk culture in exhibition spaces in turn changed understandings of art and culture.

¹⁰⁴ Anđelka Galić and Miroslav Gašžarović, eds., *Museum of Arts and Crafts Zagreb: 1880-2010, Guide* (Zagreb: Muzej za umjetnost i obrt, 2011); Nerina Eckhel, *80 godina Etnografskog muzeja* (Zagreb: Etnografski muzej, 1999).

¹⁰⁵ Vjera Bonifačić, "Ethnological Research and Canonization of Autochthonous Folk Textiles in Croatia, 1896 to 1940: A Polysystem Study" (University of Alberta, 1996).

¹⁰⁶ Aleksandra Muraj, "Tragom Antuna Jirouška: etnografija u kulturnim i inim praksama," *Etnološka tribina* 31, no. 24 (December 2001); Aleksandra Muraj, "Zamisli Velimira Deželića st. o osnivanju Etnograskog muzeja u Zagrebu," *Etnološka tribina* 36 (2006).

¹⁰⁷ Aleksandra Muraj, Nerina Eckhel, and Vesna Zorić, *Pokupska sjećanja: etnografska ekspedicija 1923* (Zagreb: Etnografski muzej 1993).

2.1 FOLK CULTURE AS “COTTAGE INDUSTRY” IN HABSBURG MUSEUMS OF APPLIED ARTS

A “bouquet of forest flowers,” that is how Austrian journalist and educator Emilie Bach described the section dedicated to “cottage industry” (*Hausindustrie*) within the 1886 *Special Exhibition of Women’s Handicraft* (*Special-Ausstellung weiblicher Handarbeiten*) at the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry in Vienna. This section brought together historic and modern pieces from various “rural” regions of Austria-Hungary. Among the objects were works from the Croatian lands: Dalmatian lacework incorporated into folk dress and colorful Croatian embroideries loaned from the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb.¹⁰⁸ In the catalog Bach described how these traditional works “had not only the allure of the original or of national character; but also possessed almost continuous aesthetic worth.” Bach discerned that in the works of these uneducated peasant women “is expressed an eminent feeling for style and a naïve, healthy sense of art [*Kunstsinn*], that is not innate in all cases to the educated female citizens of the big cities.”¹⁰⁹ Bach was reiterating a larger discourse within the field of applied arts about the superior aesthetic value and artfulness of national folk cultures in contrast to the perceived kitsch of urban middle- and upper-class mass culture. Part of what defined the cultural context of the Habsburg Monarchy is the fact that this discourse about unique and beautiful national cultures

¹⁰⁸ Works from Dalmatia and Zagreb were shown in Hall IX, one of several halls dedicated to “nationale Hausindustrie.” The catalog also reveals that Zagreb had two applied arts schools for textiles: the Applied Arts School of the Sisters of Charity (*Kunstgewerbeschule der barmherzigen Schwestern*), which produced mostly religious embroidery works based on Hermann Bolle’s designs and some works based on folk textiles, and the State Women’s Applied Arts School (*Städtische weibliche Gewerbeschule*) which used patterns and colors from folk works. These were shown in Hall VI and VII with the “modern” works from other applied arts schools, middle- and upper-class women, and commercial works. Jacob von Falke, Emilie Bach, and et al., *Special-Ausstellung weiblicher Handarbeiten im k. k. österr. Museum für Kunst und Industrie: Führer und Bericht* (Vienna: Kaiserlich-Königliches Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie, 1886).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

emanated not just from nationalists on the periphery of the empire, but also from central imperial institutions like the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry.

In order to understand Vanka's work and its early reception, we must understand the meaning of the earliest displays and collections of Croatian folkloric textiles under the auspices of museums and schools of applied arts in Vienna and Zagreb in the Habsburg Empire. This was the culture of display and the discourse in which Vanka was artistically brought up. London's Great Exhibition of 1851 prompted decades of international exhibitions of applied arts and stimulated an intense drive to use visual styles in architecture, mass-produced products, and handmade decorative arts to strengthen imperial and national economies and identities. The Great Exhibition also fostered the foundation of a new type of museum in the second half of the nineteenth century. Based on the model of London's South Kensington Museum, Vienna became home to the first museum of applied art on the continent. Emperor Franz Joseph decreed the foundation of the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry (k.k. Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie) on 7 March 1863 under the urging of pioneering art historian Rudolf von Eitelberger.¹¹⁰ The creation of a *Kunstgewerbeschule* (school of applied arts) to operate in conjunction with the museum followed four years later in 1867.

Applied arts museums were among the earliest and most important early museum institutions in Austria-Hungary. They often were the first major museum institutions to be organized and given purpose-built buildings in Vienna, Budapest, and the various other centers of the Habsburg Empire and they received grand structures built by leading architects on newly

¹¹⁰ This museum is now known as the MAK - *Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst* (Austrian Museum of Applied Arts).

constructed boulevards.¹¹¹ In both Vienna and Zagreb, applied arts museums were founded several decades before ethnographic museums. These museums and schools of applied arts were founded on bourgeois cosmopolitan values; educated and well-traveled museum workers aimed to collect and disseminate knowledge of various crafts and cultures both historic and contemporary to local, national, and international audiences. Their approach emphasized the production of economically competitive decorative arts that could be sold to urban and international consumers. In the face of an increasing amount of crude mass-produced products and under the guidance of some of the earliest art historians, this new type of public museum and school aimed to teach proper stylistic taste both to working-class artists and craftsmen through free courses and to the middle-class through lectures, exhibitions, and social events. In order to fulfill their roles as educational institutions, these museums originally organized their applied art objects into study collections by material (metalwork, glass and ceramic, furniture, etc.) rather than chronologically.¹¹²

Vienna's Museum für Kunst und Industrie became the flagship museum for a network of museums of applied arts that sprung up throughout the empire in the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹¹³ One of the ways in which the museum used this network of museums and schools was to funnel folk arts and crafts from throughout the empire to the Museum für Kunst und Industrie. In this institution and its exhibitions, the variety of folk culture displayed, like the

¹¹¹ Heinrich von Ferstel designed the Museum für Kunst und Industrie, which was begun in 1867 and opened in 1871. He was one of the principal architects of the Ringstraße development designing one of its first monuments, the Votivkirche, and the university building among other works. The construction of the Museum of Art and Industry even predates the construction of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (1871-1891), although the latter was founded earlier.

¹¹² These collections were organized by medium at least until World War I.

¹¹³ For an introduction to this museum's history see Reynolds Cordileone, "The Austrian Museum for Art and Industry: Historicism and National Identity in Vienna 1863-1900," 125-26; Noever, *Kunst und Industrie: Die Anfänge des Museums für Angewandte Kunst Wien*.

“bouquet of forest flowers” brought together in the 1886 *Special Exhibition of Women’s Handicraft*, was made to represent an imperial “unity in diversity.”

The Museum für Kunst und Industrie held several exhibitions before World War I that included Croatian folk objects, mostly textiles, beginning with the 1873 Vienna World’s Fair.¹¹⁴ At this world’s fair the embroidery works produced by middle and upper-class urban women from the Austrian crown lands were exhibited in a pavilion dedicated to “Women’s work” (*Frauenarbeit*). In contrast, the more “primitive” works, produced primarily by peasant women in the Hungarian half of the Empire including Croatia and Slavonia, were relegated to a pavilion of “cottage industry” (*Hausindustrie*).¹¹⁵ This was a physical and ideological division that would be followed in subsequent exhibitions like the 1886 *Special Exhibition of Women’s Handicraft*. In museums and exhibitions of applied arts, Croatian folk arts, especially textiles, were exhibited under the label “*nationale Hausindustrie*” in German, or “*kućni obrt*” in Croatian. Literally this translates to “house industry” or “house craft,” but is more commonly referred to in English as “cottage industry.” This applied arts approach, I would argue, is the interpretational framework most often applied to displays of Croatian folk arts up until World War I. *Hausindustrie* referred to a variety of objects—mostly textiles, but also carved wood, ceramic, metalwork—both historic and contemporary, which were made by rural populations of Austria-Hungary without formal training. The label was most often applied to works from the Hungarian-ruled lands (including Slavonia and central Croatia) and Bosnia, although rural works from the Austrian crown lands, especially the Croatian regions of Istria and Dalmatia, were sometimes included.

¹¹⁴ At least three such exhibitions were held. First, the Vienna World’s Fair in 1873, then the *Special Exhibition of Women’s Handicraft* (*Special-Ausstellung weiblicher Handarbeiten*) in 1886, and the *Cottage Industry Exhibition* (*Die Hausindustrie-Ausstellung*) in 1905/6 which was organized by ethnographer Michael Haberlandt together with the Museum für Kunst und Industrie.

¹¹⁵ Falke, Bach, and et al., *Special-Ausstellung weiblicher Handarbeiten*.

The discourse, discussed above, about the aesthetic value of the folk works emerged around the 1873 Vienna World's Fair. The *Hausindustrie* exhibition received higher praise while the urban women's works were criticized for being alarmingly distasteful.¹¹⁶ Jacob Ritter von Falke, head curator and then director of the Museum of Art and Industry, organized the 1886 *Special Exhibition of Women's Handicraft* to reassess the status of women's textile work. Reflecting on the World's Fair exhibition he wrote:

Who would have also expected, that the heavy hand of the peasant woman, that is busy all day long in the field or at the stove, should achieve things and create works, that appeared to be the quintessential right of the most tender lady's hand? ...One saw in the works of the peasant women, with which they furnish their apartment and bed and decorate their clothing, in the red, blue, black or yellow embroidery on linen, another art still living, that is just as artistically sensible as it is expressive.¹¹⁷

In his introduction he expressed romanticized surprise at the richness of the "simple" peasant woman's life, but at the same time an underlying worry runs throughout his comments about improving the status of urban women's "dilettante" works. Reiterating this intense concern with improving middle-class taste, Bach ended her essay on *Hausindustrie* by inviting women to come examine the exhibit, "not to scorn learning much from the works of simple peasant women."¹¹⁸ There was genuine hope that Austrian *Damen*, sitting in their plush apartments along the broad new avenue of the Ringstraße in Vienna, would imitate the patterns of folk embroidery from the most provincial parts of the empire, recreating the empire in their urban living rooms.

The visual language of Vanka's early folkloric works, with their careful focus on rendering the intricate textile techniques of folk dress right down to the stitches, reinforced the

¹¹⁶ Rebecca Houze has discussed this division in these exhibitions between "dilettante" textile works and peasant works at length, and laid out the resulting discourse about the superiority of rural folk textiles that had implications for applied arts reforms that attempted to professionalize and improve the taste of women's textile work. Houze, "At the Forefront of a Newly Emerging Profession? Ethnography, Education and the Exhibition of Women's Needlework in Austria-Hungary in the Late Nineteenth Century."

¹¹⁷ Falke, Bach, and et al., *Special-Ausstellung weiblicher Handarbeiten*, 4-5.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

discourse put forward by these imperial applied arts exhibitions in Vienna about the aesthetic value and inherent artfulness of “cottage industry.” Milčinović, Lunaček, Strajnić, and other critics of Vanka’s early work did not perceive the artist’s work as nationalist because they were accustomed to seeing these messages championing the beauty of national folk culture coming from imperial institutions. Folk culture from the various ends of the Empire including the Croatian regions was appropriated into the imperial imaginary. Vanka’s folkloric works, especially his works from before and during World War I, need to be understood in the context of this period of turn-of-the-century European cosmopolitanism during which the first world’s fairs and museums emerged and the last art salons took place. Vanka’s works were about the local culture surrounding Zagreb, but they fit into an exhibition culture aimed at international audiences. This juried academic salon setting in which he exhibited *Proštenjari* at the Exposition générale des beaux-arts Salon Triennal in Brussels in 1914 was targeted at such international audiences and attempted to confirm and define good taste, much like the exhibitions organized by Vienna’s Museum für Kunst und Industrie.

2.2 FOLK CULTURE IN ZAGREB’S MUZEJ ZA UMJETNOST I OBRT

The earliest efforts to organize exhibitions of Croatian folk culture undertaken in Zagreb were done in cooperation and communication with Vienna’s Museum für Kunst und Industrie. The exhibitions dealt with potentially political national content, but within the context of the applied arts, folk culture was subsumed harmlessly into the wider Habsburg imperial project both in Vienna and in Zagreb. While in Vienna the educational goals and imperial network of the applied arts museums were meant to strengthen the unity of the Empire through culture and

commerce, outside of Vienna these museums of applied arts did attempt to highlight their own narratives that addressed local needs and politics. The Muzej za umjetnost i obrt in Zagreb (Museum of Arts and Crafts) was founded with local development in mind. The idea to found a museum of applied arts within the Croatian National Museum was circulated at the very first meeting of the Zagreb Association of Arts (Društvo umjetnosti u Zagrebu) in 1868, just five years after Vienna's Museum für Kunst und Industrie was founded. However, it was not actually founded until twelve years later, on 17 February 1880.¹¹⁹ Like in Vienna, it was initiated by one of the first trained art historians, Izidor Kršnjavi (1845-1927), then secretary of the Association of Arts, who became the founding director of the museum. In 1882 a school of applied arts was opened that later merged with the museum. Both museum and school were taken over by the provincial government in 1886. The architect and city planner, Herman Bolle, who was responsible for transforming the urban cityscape of Zagreb at the turn of the century, designed a building for the museum in German Renaissance style on a prominent square in a newly urbanized section of the city that was completed in 1888. Although exhibitions were opened periodically at different locations, the museum would not officially open its doors to the public until around 1920.

In his correspondence with Vienna's Museum für Kunst und Industrie, Kršnjavi expressed two main reasons why he thought it important that Zagreb had its own museum of applied arts. First and foremost, he was part of a drive to improve the situation of the arts in general in a—until very recently—provincial area with almost no local art scene and few trained artists and architects that were not imported from Vienna or Budapest. In a report to Vienna, written just after the founding of Zagreb's Muzej za umjetnost i obrt, Kršnjavi noted that the

¹¹⁹ For a short introduction to the history of the museum see Galić and Gašžarović, *Museum of Arts and Crafts Zagreb: 1880-2010, Guide*.

museum would support the two main categories of art present in the Croatians lands, what he labeled “cosmopolitan imported art” and “national cottage industry.”¹²⁰ The museum, in his vision, would create an educational collection with which to train young artisans, especially stone masons, who could build Zagreb’s new cosmopolitan institutions and “restore” monuments, and embroiders, who were, at least in part, reviving traditional Croatian textile practices. Kršnjavi emphasizes that the new museum would especially aim to protect and develop cottage industry, which he saw as threatened by the decline of the communal household and introduction of western culture and reforms.¹²¹

Secondly, in order to build up the arts in the Croatian lands, the museum was necessary to create a narrative of a distinctly Croatian visual culture. Significantly, the Croatian artistic identity Kršnjavi describes in his communication with Vienna is often fluid, claiming ties to both the West and the East depending on which is most advantageous at the moment. He starts off his report by claiming that Croatia has long been aligned with Western Europe citing their support in the battle against the Ottoman Empire.

The numerous remains of gothic architecture, which survived the turbulent times, in which the folk here clashed, testify that the Croatians, even in the difficult Turkish wars where watch was held on the Sava River, took part in Europe’s cultural movements...Through this intimate connection with Western culture, often at the expense of their national characteristic, the Croatians differed from the kindred Serbs, who share with them the same language, the same folk customs, the same folk art, but whose Cultural aspirations are connected in a very conservative manner with the Eastern European current.¹²²

¹²⁰ “Die Kunstbestrebungen in den croatischen Ländern sind zweierlei; es ist da eine im Niedergang befindliche nationale Hausindustrie und es ist die kosmopolitische importierte Kunst, welche nebeneinander bestehen.” Izidor Kršnjavi, “Kunstbestrebungen Croation,” *Mittheilungen des k. k. Oesterreich. Museums für Kunst und Industrie* XV, no. 174 (1880): 44.

¹²¹ Ibid., 46.

¹²² “Zahlreiche Reste gothischer Baukunst, welche die stürmischen Zeiten überdauerten, in welchen die Völker bei uns aneinander schlugen, bezeugen es, dass Croation bis zu den schweren Türkenkriegen, wo es die Wacht an der Save hielt, an der Culturbewegung [sic] Europa’s regen Antheil nahm... Durch diesen innigen Zusammenhang mit der westlichen Cultur, oft selbst auf Kosten ihrer nationalen Eigenthümlichkeiten, unterscheiden sich die Croaten von den stammverwandten Serben, welche mit ihnen zwar dieselbe Sprache, dieselben Volkssitten, dieselbe

Tapping into the myth of Croatians as defenders of the borders of Christianity allows him to pose Croatian culture as more civilized, to distinguish it from Serbian culture, and to take advantage of Vienna's resources. However, Kršnjavi is wary of claiming too close ties with Western culture to the disadvantage of maintaining a unique and singular Croatian folk culture. Quite in contrast to his beginning statements, at the end of this report Kršnjavi claims cultural alliance with Serbia and the "Orient" in order to present Croatia as having a richer *Hausindustrie*. In another report to Vienna he claims that contact with the Ottoman Empire fostered folk art in some regards, "in Croatia and Slavonia *Hausindustrie* is mostly spread across those regions, that were in contact with the Orient the longest..."¹²³ So while efforts to support "cosmopolitan imported art" aligned themselves best with Kršnjavi's claim to the inherent Western aspect of Croatian culture, he used "cottage industry" to highlight those unique aspects of Croatian culture more closely aligned with the Balkans and Ottoman Empire.¹²⁴

The serious exhibition of Croatian folks arts domestically really began with Kršnjavi and the Association of Arts.¹²⁵ With the Association, Kršnjavi organized an exhibition of domestic craft ("Izložba domaćega obrta") which opened on the 20 November 1881 and attempted to bring together works "from all regions of Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia, military regions, Bosnia and Herzegovina, so that for at least some time it creates a full representation of our nation's

Volkskunst theilen, deren Culturbestrebungen aber in sehr conservative Weise mit der osteuropäischen Strömung zusammenhängen." Ibid., 43.

¹²³ Izidor Kršnjavi, "Die slavische Hausindustrie," *Mittheilungen des k. k. Oesterreich. Museums für Kunst und Industrie* XVII, no. 198 (1882): 58.

¹²⁴ Restoration of the Zagreb cathedral in a Gothic style is one of the examples that Kršnjavi gives for this "cosmopolitan imported art."

¹²⁵ The discussion in this project is restricted to Kršnjavi's involvement in exhibiting folk culture domestically, but Kršnjavi was also responsible for organizing some of the first exhibitions of Croatian art, industry, and folk culture abroad including Trieste's 1882 trade fair and Hungary's 1896 Millennial Exhibition in Budapest. For more on this see Rachel Rossner, "The secessionists are the Croats. They've been given their own pavilion. . .": Vlaho Bukovac's Battle for Croatian Autonomy at the 1896 Millennial Exhibition in Budapest," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 6, no. 1 (2007).

work and profession.”¹²⁶ The exhibition was attended by important political figures and received positive attention, despite the fact that many regions of the Croatian lands were only weakly represented in the exhibition. Slavonia had the most textile works, followed by Dalmatia. It is clear from reviews of the exhibition and from Kršnjavi’s own presentation in Vienna on Slavic *Hausindustrie*, that Kršnjavi and his contemporaries were searching for the most financially- and materially-viable cottage industry to build the economy of the Croatian lands.¹²⁷ Through comparisons to Russian and Bulgarian industry, Kršnjavi saw the textile industry as the only financially-viable option for Croats and Serbs, but it was being threatened by industry.

In the front of the irresistible power of the great spinning machine, which works with more than a thousand spindles, the portable distaff and the simple spindle are disappearing; in front of the products of the steam-powered loom the beautiful weavings of the primitive are disappearing; the chemistry displaces the simple empiricism of the art of dyeing, the simplest considerations of the national economy cannot approve that the whole youth of a village leads an idyllic shepherd’s life, at the same time embroidering, singing glorious songs, and drawing beautiful dried gourds.¹²⁸

Kršnjavi set a precedent of seeing folk art as a profitable and distinctly Croatian economic product. This viewpoint was propagated in domestic and international exhibitions that followed, including a large exhibition held at the 1891 Jubilee Exhibition of Agriculture and Forestry (Jubilarna gospodarsko-šumarska izložba) in Zagreb, and in exhibitions organized after 1900 by manufacturer Salomon Berger and even in Vanka’s artwork, as will be discussed in the next section.

¹²⁶ Izidor Kršnjavi, "Poziv/Anruf," (Zagreb: Društvo umjetnosti u Zagrebu, 1881). See file on this exhibition held at the Arhiv likovne umjetnosti, Zagreb. This exhibition went by several similar names in announcements and reviews: Izložba hrvatskih/narodnih domaćih obrtnina, Izložba domaćega obrta, Izložba kućnoga obrta. There had been a similar exhibition of applied arts in 1879, but this one was the first of its kind to focus on domestic cottage industry.

¹²⁷ Kršnjavi, "Die slavische Hausindustrie."

¹²⁸ Kršnjavi, "Die slavische Hausindustrie," 137.

Kršnjavi's efforts to improve national artistic culture in the Croatian regions, through both cosmopolitan and folk culture, reveals how such nationalist efforts coexisted with the centralizing imperialism of Vienna's Musuem für Kunst und Industrie. Within the Habsburg Monarchy, these efforts to distinguish local art and culture were not necessarily incompatible with imperial claims to sovereign power. The significant point to understand is that Vanka's early artworks occupied a similar position in the late Habsburg Monarchy. They celebrated local folk culture without challenging imperial sovereignty. Kršnjavi's own review of Vanka's 1915 exhibition underlines the fact that Vanka's works were not perceived as nationalist at the time of their painting. Kršnjavi, like Strajnić, never mentions the inherent value of folkloric content in Vanka's work, and he too criticizes Vanka for too closely imitating the dark palette of Spanish painters in his work *Marija Bistrica* (1915) and in his portraits.¹²⁹ On the other hand, Kršnjavi, with his background in applied arts, praised Vanka's "decorative strength" and imagined that Vanka's brightly colorful works like *Proštenjari* would transfer nicely to glass or porcelain. Vanka would later struggle to break with this view of his work as decorative in the late 1920s.

While many of these applied arts exhibitions predated Vanka, the artist certainly came in contact with one of the major ethnographic publications that came out during the Habsburg Monarchy. The massive multi-volume work *The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Word and Image* (*Die Österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild*), also known as the *Kronprinzenwerk*, was published between 1886 and 1902. Adamic even alluded to the work in *Cradle of Life* meaning Vanka may have mentioned it to him.¹³⁰ Each volume was dedicated to

¹²⁹ Kršnjavi, "Izložba Maksimilijana Vanke," 1.

¹³⁰ Adamic wrote, "Rudolf was the author of two books, *Fifteen Days on the Danube* and *A Journey in the East*; wrote also on scientific subjects and was partly responsible for the monumental description of the monarchy, *Austria-Hungary in Word and Picture*." In Adamic's novel, the main character is supposedly the illegitimate son of Crown Prince Rudolf. In reality Vanka was likely the illegitimate child of much lower ranking Habsburg nobility.

documenting the landscape, people, and culture of a different region of the Monarchy. By documenting these regions and their cultures, the Kronprinzenwerk made the Empire into one discreet, manageable, and knowable whole.

The final volume of the *Kronprinzenwerk*—twenty-fourth in the series—reported on Croatia and Slavonia. Vanka's teacher, Bela Čikoš Sesija, produced many of the illustrations of Zagreb included in the volume. Another artist of the older generation, Ivan Tišov (1870-1928), composed an illustration of Croatian and Slavonian folk dress for the section on folk culture.¹³¹ Tišov's illustration reveals carefully positioned figures, many with their backs to the viewer in order to elevate the textile work that they wear over the role of narrative. Vanka's early works including *Proštenjari* and his *Lijepa Jela* triptych (c. 1916) adopt the same type of multi-figure composition used by Tišov in this early Austro-Hungarian ethnographic document. At the center of Tišov's work is a woman in the same Gračani folk dress seen in Vanka's *Proštenjari*. Both Vanka and Tišov use the hills and foliage of the landscape to carefully frame their displays of folk dress. This form of ethnographic depiction is visible in other works by Vanka as well. For example, the figures in Vanka's 1929 *Spring Blessing*, which was presented as a *Ženski list* embroidery pattern discussed in Chapter 3, appear in a similar manner to his 1913 *Proštenjari*: they are all turned away from the viewer and seen in profile as they kneel in prayer, so that their folk dress can be freely examined by the viewer. The careful embroidery on the man's vest and cloth applique work on the woman's jacket are both from folk dress specific to areas around Zagreb. The woman's vest even resembles in almost all facets a vest portrayed in an illustration

For more on Louis Adamic and his relationship to Vanka see Chapter 1 and Chapter 5. Louis Adamic, *Cradle of Life: The Story of One Man's Beginnings* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936), 124.

¹³¹ *Die Österreich-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild. Croatien und Slavonien. Auf Anregung und unter Mitwirkung des durchlauchtigsten Kronprinzen Erzherzog Rudolf*, (Vienna: Kaiserlich-königl. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1902), 103.

by Vanka's fellow artist Zdenka Sertić that accompanied a 1924 ethnographic article about the variety of folk dress worn across the Zagreb mountain Medvednica.¹³² Since Vanka had recently worked with Sertić on the poster for the 1928 Zagreb Trade Fair, he certainly would have been familiar with this article and probably copied Sertić's ethnographic illustrations.

Examining Vanka's early works like *Proštenjari* in the context of the history of applied arts and ethnographic research reveals their overlap with both early ethnographic imagery and museum display of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The affinity of Vanka's early folkloric work with early ethnographic imagery and display may be at the heart of another fundamental issue that many critics of Vanka's folkloric work both past and present have raised—their artificial appearance.¹³³ Although Vanka maintained a certain level of realism in his works' focus on the techniques of folk dress and the ceremony of rural rituals, their artfully arranged compositions seem to suspend time and reality. Milčinović, who was known for supporting realism in the arts, remarked about *Proštenjari* in 1913:

The painting is intended as a decorative work, however in it a clean realistic moment is well combined with an actually imagined situation. Realistic details (background with view to the hills under Sljeme with people from Gračani, and faithfully depicted peasant faces, dress, etc.) function so that we forget that the situation is combined.¹³⁴

¹³² This specific vest was ascribed by ethnographer Vladimir Tkalčić and artist Zdenka Sertić, both employed by the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, to the Poljanica region just east of the city of Zagreb. In the interwar period this included a number of villages (Resnik, Granešina, Vugrovec and others) that today have been absorbed by the expanded city. Vanka had accompanied Tkalčić on his 1923 ethnographic expedition. Vladimir Tkalčić, "Seljačke nošnje u području Zagrebačke gore," *Narodna starina* 4, no. 10 (1924): 146.

¹³³ When I say present, I am referring to Grgo Gamulin's 1995 accusation of ethnographic "fabulism" in Vanka's work. Gamulin, "Maksimilijan Vanka."

¹³⁴ "Slika je zamišljena kao dekorativna radnja, pak je u njoj dobro spojen čisto realistički momenat sa zapravo izmišljenom situacijom. Realistički detalji (pozadina s pogledom na brežuljke pod Sljemenom s Gračanima, zatim vjerno prikazana seljačka lica, nošnja itd.) djeluju tako, da zaboravljamo na to, da je situacija iskombinovana." Milčinović, "Dešković i Vanka," 751.

Antun Jiroušek, who also noted this fusion of the real and the imagined, remarked, “On these two foundations Vanka built his world—reality and fantasy, story and truth!”¹³⁵ In their suggestion that Vanka’s work is imagined, what some critics would call “studio fabulation,” lies a problematic understanding of Vanka’s work that will be clarified in the following discussion of Vanka’s interwar ethnographic activities.¹³⁶ Although these early compositions make folk culture appear timeless, for Vanka folk culture was neither frozen nor extinct. Folk culture was still very much a living, vital part of his early twentieth century Central Croatian society, and furthermore, he thought folk culture could be positively used to affect the economic and social status of rural populations.

From a contemporary viewpoint, Vanka’s early folkloric paintings deal with nationally-charged imagery. However, the way in which Croatian folk art was integrated into an imperial narrative about the aesthetic value of “cottage industry” in the context of applied arts exhibitions and early ethnography in the late Habsburg Monarchy took away from the inherent nationalist power of such imagery. Croatian folk culture was appropriated into the imperial imaginary of the Habsburg Empire that sought unity in the variety of folk cultures. The Austrian Museum for Art and Industry used exhibitions of “cottage industry” in order to reshape the taste of bourgeois women and to produce better economic goods. In Zagreb, early interest in folk culture was also about finding a viable cottage industry in order to foster a national art scene and a profitable industry. In this context, Vanka’s early folkloric works were not perceived as nationalist, but rather as foreign because of their stylistic models. After World War I the collections of folk objects in the applied arts museums in both Vienna and Zagreb were relocated to ethnographic

¹³⁵ Jiroušek, “Naše slike,” 118.

¹³⁶ Ivo Šrepel, “Maksimilijan Vanka (uz kolektivnu izložbu u Umjetničkom paviljonu),” *Jutarnji list*, 13 April 1934.

museums that moved toward codified scientific classification and promoting increasingly racially-based nationalist projects.¹³⁷ This would lead to a reinterpretation of Vanka's works.

2.3 PRESERVING THE NATION: ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUMS AFTER THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE

Vanka was actively involved in the ethnographic scene after World War I. On 16 July 1923 Vanka and eight others headed off from Zagreb on a four-week ethnographic expedition organized by Zagreb's Etnografski muzej. They took the train to the smaller neighboring city of Karlovac where they started a 100-kilometer trip along the Kupa River from Karlovac to Sisak by rubber kayak.¹³⁸ Along the route they stopped to visit 34 villages. The Pokuplje region was just hours from Zagreb and was already known to collectors for its colorful folk embroideries, but its folk culture and folk dress had not yet been systematically documented by the emerging specialization of professional ethnographers. The aim of the expedition was to determine and record the characteristics of regional dress, architecture, economies, and crafts, while collecting objects for both the Etnografski muzej and the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ The *Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde* (Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art) received its permanent home in the Schönborn Garden Palace in Josefstadt in 1919.

¹³⁸ The main source of information on this expedition is a short book published by the Etnografski muzej: Muraj, Eckhel, and Zorić, *Pokupska sjećanja: etnografska ekspedicija 1923*. Muraj's sources included several field notebooks recorded by curators Vladimir Tkalčić and Milovan Gavazzi, some official correspondence in the archives of the Etnografski Muzej, and an article published by Gavazzi in 1964. The expedition received little coverage in newspapers or contemporary publications. In English see Vjera Bonifačić, "Ethnological Research in Croatia, 1919-1940," *Narodna Umjetnost* 33, no. 2 (1996).

¹³⁹ According to correspondence in the archives of the Etnografski muzej the exact purpose of the expedition was, "...to examine from an ethnographic standpoint the region along the Kupa River starting from Karlovac to Sisak and especially with regard to the material culture of the local population. (...) so far this area of our homeland was never studied in this way. Especially to go in order to determine, how far west the Sisak-Petrinja type of dress reaches, as the most characteristic for the upper Croatian Posavina region. Besides that, one of the most important questions to solve: the type of peasant wooden architecture of the aforementioned area, and, in addition, folk fishing on the Kupa

Two curators from the newly-founded Etnografski muzej headed the expedition, Vladimir Tkalčić (1883-1971) and Milovan Gavazzi (1895-1992). Vanka was probably invited to take part because his colleague at the Royal Academy of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb, artist Srećko Sabljak, was one of the driving forces in organizing the expedition.¹⁴⁰ While Tkalčić photographed people and places and Gavazzi made sound recordings, Vanka and Sabljak focused primarily on drawing and painting the traditional wooden architecture and interiors of village churches and houses as well as landscapes. In one photograph of the expedition, Vanka stands knee-deep in the Kupa River accompanied by the ethnographic team and their canoes. Behind them we catch a glimpse of the Pokuplje landscape. It is scattered with thatched-roof houses and, on the hill above Vanka, a church tower is just visible behind the trees. Among the surviving works from this expedition are two watercolors painted by Vanka: *Cerje na Kupi* (*Cerje on the Kupa River*) dated 27 July 1923 and *Motiv sa Kupe kraj Petrinje* (*Motif from Kupa River near Petrinja*).¹⁴¹ In both watercolors, Vanka depicted these small wooden churches with a bell tower over the entry that are typical for this region and locates them in the middle ground of rural landscapes. The landscapes are somewhat gestural, but Vanka articulated some details of the rafters and wall construction of the churches. Such churches on hilltops appeared in the background of several of Vanka's folkloric works produced before the expedition, and would

River and the entire cottage industry, particularly weaving, embroidery and wood carving." Quoted in Muraj, Eckhel, and Zorić, *Pokupska sjećanja: etnografska ekspedicija 1923*, 9. The expedition collected objects including textiles, artworks, and tools. Sacral objects went to the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt, while the majority of acquisitions, photographs, recordings, and notes went to the Etnografski muzej.

¹⁴⁰ Srećko Sabljak (1892-1938) was an academic painter and wood carver. He took up woodcarving during World War I, studied in Paris in 1920, and then worked with students in Lepoglava (north of Zagreb). His work incorporated elements of folk art into applied arts, and the Etnografski muzej held an exhibition of his works from December 1922 to January 1923. According to Muraj, he purchased the rubber rafts for the expedition with his own funds. Among the remaining members of the expedition were friends and acquaintances of Tkalčić and Sabljak, and notably two women, who were mainly responsible for cooking and camp. Ibid., 11.

¹⁴¹ These artworks are now located at the Memorijalna Zbirka Maksimilijana Vanke on the island of Korčula, run by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

become an increasingly central focus in works in the years following the expedition. Ultimately, it was the use of symbols like these churches that divided Vanka from the increasing scientific and ethnographic approach to folk culture.

Based on the surviving works and Muraj's account, Vanka's focus during the expedition was on this regional architecture. In his folkloric paintings, Vanka focused on folk dress and ceremony, but on the ethnographic expedition he did not draw any images of folk dress. Tkalčić and Gavazzi, the two professional ethnographers, took charge of the task of documenting folk textiles, which made up the majority of the new museum's collection. The Etnografski muzej's curators represented a new generation of urban professional ethnographers. In particular Vladimir Tkalčić, the museum's first curator (1919-1925) and later second director (1925-1934), was a defining force in the new institution. He had studied history, archeology, and art history in Zagreb and Paris.¹⁴² Under his guidance the museum moved towards documenting only traditional, "pure" forms of peasant culture. If Kršnjavi had lamented that folk culture was fading in the wake of industry in 1882, Tkalčić threatened its very extinction:

We need to make up for the missed opportunities in the past. Because traditional spirit (-part of our national being, carrier of our own most beautiful characteristics, which we need to place as our most beautiful gift at the altar of the progress of our culture-), harmonious spirit, with which our popular creations were made until now, that spirit is vanishing day by day in front of all of us...¹⁴³

Tkalčić makes its clear in this 1922 mission statement that the urgent purpose of the new museum is to record, classify, and preserve folk culture before it disappeared completely. This

¹⁴² Around 1907 Tkalčić began working for the archeology section of the National Museum, becoming a curator in 1917. In 1919 he began working as the only curator at the newly founded ethnographic section of the Croatian National Museum. He became director of the Etnografski muzej in 1925 after Salamon Berger retired until 1934 when he became director of the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt. Katarina Bušić, "Salamon Berger and the Beginnings of the Exhibition Activity of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb," *Ethnological Researches* 1, no. 14 (2009): 305.

¹⁴³ Quoted [sic] in Bonifačić, "Ethnological Research in Croatia, 1919-1940," 242. Original text Vladimir Tkalčić, "Etnografski Muzej u Zagrebu," *Narodna starina* 1, no. 1 (1922): 75.

contrasted with Kršnjavi's applied arts view of folk craft as living culture that needed to be revitalized for the benefit of the local economy and culture.

Additionally, Tkalčić stated openly the motivation of this new ethnographic approach was to define the characteristics of a distinct national identity, in a way not possible under the Habsburg Monarchy. However, within the context of the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, Tkalčić was purposely ambiguous about whether he was referring to the Croatian nation or the Yugoslav nation. In a set of guidelines for the new museum from later in 1922, Tkalčić skillfully maneuvered between using “our nation” (“naš narod”) to refer to Croatian culture and using “our nation” to refer to the greater Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Tkalčić wrote, “The goal of the Ethnographic department of the Croatian National Museum is to represent all life and culture of our nation, above all peasants, who to this day have best preserved our national characteristics.”¹⁴⁴ Here “our nation” obviously refers to the Croatian nation - the vast majority of the Etnografski muzej’s collection and research was dedicated to folk culture of regions traditionally considered as belonging to Croatia—Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, and parts of Bosnia. A few lines later, Tkalčić continues that the museum’s collections are to be aimed especially at foreigners and “other parts of our nation, who for centuries were prevented by barriers from getting to know each other.”¹⁴⁵ In this second quote, “our nation” refers to the new state and the various South Slavic regions that have been politically divided for centuries. This complicated juggling reveals that the new Etnograski muzej was a more explicit site for building Croatian national identity through folk culture than the Muzej za umjetnost i

¹⁴⁴ “Zadaća je Etnograskog odjela Hrvatskoga narodnog muzeja da prikaže sav život i kulturu našega naroda, u prvom redu seljaka, koji je najviše dodanas sačuvao u sebi naše narone značajke.” Vladimir Tkalčić, “Naputak za povjerenike Etnografskog Muzeja u Zagrebu,” *Narodna starina* 2, no. 3 (1922): 347.

¹⁴⁵ “Kod posljednjega ima naročito na umu inostranstvo te one dijelove našega naroda, koji stoljetnim zaprekama sprečavani nisu imali zgode, da se međusobno upoznaju.” Ibid.

obrt. However, like the applied arts museums before it, the new museum still had to operate within the confines of a larger state identity.

An important shift took place in the reception of Vanka's work after Tkalčić laid out the mission of the new Etnografski muzej to collect and preserve disappearing national folk culture and after the museum opened its permanent collection to the public in 1922. It was at that moment that critics began to take notice of the nationalizing potential of Vanka's folkloric works. Art historian, critic, and later director of the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt (1925-1933), Antun Jiroušek (1873-1949), published an enthusiastic discussion of Vanka's folkloric paintings in the literary and cultural journal *Vijenac* in 1923.¹⁴⁶ He stated, "Vanka tells us in his paintings how the artist feels while observing the life of the Croatian peasant. From these paintings gushes out enormous devotion and honest love towards the Croatian village."¹⁴⁷ Jiroušek became the first of many who provided a romanticized account of Vanka's upbringing by a peasant wet nurse in Zagorje. "This big love towards his folk—deep and wide—which Vanka absorbed at the breast of a Croatian peasant woman—Vanka showed in creations of the spirit and heart."¹⁴⁸ Jiroušek even approved of Vanka's use of Spanish models as the vehicle for this Croatian content. Furthermore, Jiroušek was the first to consistently use the word "Croatian" to describe the content of Vanka's folkloric works. In previous reviews, the word had only been used to describe the location of some of Vanka's landscapes. However, a rare quote from Vanka included in the article reveals that the artist did not see his work in the same terms. Vanka chose the word "Slavic" rather than "Croatian" to describe the inspiration of his works:

¹⁴⁶ Jiroušek was actually originally asked to head the Etnografski muzej together with Salamon Berger, but refused to work with Berger. For more information on Jiroušek see Muraj, "Tragom Antuna Jirouška: etnografija u kulturnim i inim praksama."

¹⁴⁷ Jiroušek, "Naše slike," 118.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

I am happy and overjoyed when I am among those to whom I am closest according to maternal milk, because there that pure real Slavic generosity warms and inspires me; there I regularly feel ... that I cannot pull my folk from its milieu to my paintings, but that as an artist I must get closer to my folk in my paintings.¹⁴⁹

In a demonstration of Yugoslav rhetoric left over from the World War I period, Vanka retained a universalist understanding of his work as channeling pan-Slavic qualities. In contrast, Jiroušek maneuvered his work towards representing something distinctly Croatian.

The implementation of new goals and methods at the Etnografski muzej by Tkalčić suggested a new period of professionalized and scientific ethnography in Zagreb. Yet, a further look at the foundation of the museum reveals the break with older approaches to collecting and displaying folk culture were not complete. One of the older practices on which the new museum still relied took the form of a large network of *povjerenici*—literally translated as “trustees,” but better translated as “collaborators” or “volunteers.” As Tkalčić specified in 1922, this network of people interested in ethnography was meant to aid the museum in the collection of objects related to traditional culture. It actually was based on one of the earliest iterations of ethnography in the region, formulated by the so-called father of Croatian ethnography, Antun Radić, in which a questionnaire was created that literate volunteers could use to collect cultural information about their locality.¹⁵⁰ (A few years later in 1904, Antun Radić would help found, together with his

¹⁴⁹ “Ja sam stetan i presretan kad sam među onima, kojima sam po materinjem mlijeku najbliži, jer me ondje zagrijava i oduhovljuje ona čista i prava slavenska širokogrudnost; tu redovno osjećam—isповijeda obrazovani otmjeni i tankoćutni Vanka—da ne smijem svoj narod iz njegovog milieu-a na svoje slike navlačiti, već da se ja kao umjetnik moram u svojim slikama približiti svome narodu.” Noticably, Vanka avoids the usual “our folk/nation” and says instead “my folk/nation.” Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ In 1897 Antun Radić published the survey “Basics for Collecting and Studying Material on Folk Life” (“*Osnova za sabiranje i proučavanje građe o narodnom životu*”) that was used by literate volunteers (from a small group clergy and middle-class professionals) extensively up until 1919 to collect written ethnographic information. Significantly, Radić did not intend for it to be used exclusively on Croats. In an article introducing the survey Radić described the intended subjects of his survey: “Who are the people? Here one does not have an entire people in mind, whether Croatian, or Serbian, or Slovenian, or Bulgarian, but rather that majority of the people who—let us say at present in any case—live in the village, and work with their hands, the majority of whom do not wear French suits, who never went to school, or almost never. And, true enough, these are the differences which separate the

brother Stjepan Radić, what would become the leading political party among interwar Croatians—the Croatian Peasant Party.) This older form of ethnography, in which untrained dilettante ethnographers collected information and objects from the field continued in the new institution. In 1922 Vanka was named as one such *povjerenik* along with a number of other prominent cultural figures including Ženka Frangeš, secretary of the Women's Society and wife of artist Robert Frangeš-Mihanović, artist Tomislav Krizman, and Antun Jiroušek among others.¹⁵¹ Vanka in this role of amateur ethnographer donated works to the museum on at least two occasions: a “peasant walking stick carved with snakes” from Belovar in 1929 and “women’s clothing” from Zaprešić in 1931.¹⁵² Both locations were near Zagreb.

The approach of the Etnografski muzej’s founding director, Salamon Berger (1858-1934), to collecting folk culture was another major reason the museum did not entirely transition to newer methodologies in the 1920s. Unlike Tkalčić, Berger belonged to the previous generation of folk art collectors coming out of the Habsburg Monarchy. Originally from Slovakia, born to Jewish parents, Berger arrived in Croatia at 17 in a region around Sisak famous for its decorative textiles. Just a year later in 1876 he started collecting weavings, embroidery, and lace, building up a prominent collection over the next 30 years. In 1885 he started procuring cottage industry products to exhibit and sell abroad.¹⁵³ His orders grew so large that with support from the Croatian provincial government he opened a school of weaving in 1902 where women

people from the gentilefolk, the intelligentsia, but neither each one alone, nor all of them together are, as we shall see, real differences, by which we could distinguish a person of the people from a gentleman. The real difference lies in a different culture. The gentilefolk have their culture, and the people have theirs.” Quoted in Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, *Ethnology, Myth, and Politics: Anthropologizing Croatian Ethnology*, ed. Jasna Čapo Žmegač (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 27.

¹⁵¹ "Povjerenici Etnograskoga odjela Hrvatskoga narodnog muzeja u Zagrebu," *Narodna starina* 2, no. 2 (1922): 207-8.

¹⁵² "Privatni promicatelji Etnografskog muzeja u Zagrebu," *Narodna starina* 8, no. 20 (1929): 222; "Privatni promicatelji Etnografskog muzeja u Zagrebu," *Narodna starina* 10, no. 1 (1931): 154.

¹⁵³ Bušić, "Salamon Berger and the Beginnings of the Exhibition Activity".

made new textile products using designs and techniques from historic folk works. As the leading force in Croatia attempting to make cottage industry profitable, around 1900 this industrialist and merchant took over the organization of domestic and international exhibitions of “cottage industry” from Izidor Kršnjavi.¹⁵⁴ In 1913, the same year that Vanka was exhibiting his *Proštenjari* in Brussels, Berger published a short book, *The Tragedy of the Croatian Domestic Textile Industry*, describing his 30 years of organizing international exhibitions and training weavers, all using his own funds, and lamenting that the provincial government never paid him any of their promised subsidies.¹⁵⁵ From the start, Berger’s main interest in folk art was economic profit. “Through a full 28 years I worked on these works tirelessly, invested my whole fortune in the enterprise and made it my life purpose to develop the Croatian cottage works into a world commodity.”¹⁵⁶ Despite these claimed financial setbacks, he remained active in promoting the production and sale of domestic handicraft until his death in 1934.¹⁵⁷

At the turn of the century Berger and his collection of folk textiles played an important role in a new Museum of Commerce and Craft (*Trgovačko-obrtni muzej*), the forerunner to the Etnografski muzej in Zagreb. In 1904, the Chamber of Commerce and Craft (*Trgovačko-obrtnička komora*) built a new headquarters together with this adjoining museum on a square in expanding Zagreb (figs. 2.4 and 2.10).¹⁵⁸ The Museum of Commerce and Craft was similar to

¹⁵⁴ In the interwar period Berger helped organize international and domestic exhibitions of folk art, in this case primarily small products of cottage industry that could be sold to the urban middle- and upper-classes both domestically and abroad. This includes exhibitions for the 1925 Paris International Exhibition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts, another special small exhibition in Paris in 1927, 1929 Barcelona International Exposition, and a special exhibition for Copenhagen in 1930 among others. Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Salamon Berger, *Die Tragödie der Kroatischen Textilhausindustrie* (1913). Published in German and Croatian.

¹⁵⁶ “Durch volle 28 Jahre habe ich an diesem Werke rastlos gearbeitet, habe mein ganzes Vermögen in das Unternehmen investiert und machte es mir zur Lebensaufgabe, die kroatischen Heimarbeiten zu einem Weltartikel auszugestalten.” Ibid., 27.

¹⁵⁷ Bušić, “Salamon Berger and the Beginnings of the Exhibition Activity ” 306.

¹⁵⁸ The ornamentation of the museum building still reveals this original function. On the façade an allegorical sculptural group by Rudolf Valdec positioned in front of the dome represents Croatia flanked by Craft and Commerce. The interior of the dome, painted by Oton Iveković depicts further symbols of craft and commerce.

the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt in that it was organized by medium, included study collections for instructing students, and exhibited student and apprentice works.¹⁵⁹ However, it also showcased Croatian raw materials and products, and much of its collection was exhibited under the names of companies and craftsmen. The goal of the new museum was to help modernize the region's economy by aiding in the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy. However, from the outset it faltered. In part, its mission overlapped with that of the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt and the new Zagreb trade fair in 1909. In addition, at the center of the new museum's collection, installed in the rotunda on the first floor in the architectural heart of the new museum space, was a collection of Salamon Berger's folk textiles—handmade objects carefully produced by rural agricultural communities.¹⁶⁰ Paradoxically, Berger's collection would seem to contradict the museum's goal to create an industrial economy, but the collection received a lot of public attention in the space and was eventually purchased by the museum.¹⁶¹

After many years of attempts to found an ethnographic museum, on 22 October 1919 the Museum of Commerce was converted to the Ethnographic Department of the Croatian National Museum - the Etnografski muzej.¹⁶² In contrast to the applied art museums of the late nineteenth century, the ethnographic museums—all founded after the Great War—received much less grand treatment. In both Vienna and Zagreb, museums of applied arts were given purpose-built buildings designed by the top architects on prominent boulevards. In contrast, ethnographic museums in both Vienna and Zagreb, institutions that no longer received imperial funds, were

¹⁵⁹ Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, "Kako se Trgovačko-obrtni Muzej u Zagrebu pretvorio u Etnografski Muzej," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 25 (1992): 62.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 64.

¹⁶¹ It was purchased by the Museum of Commerce and Craft when they became aware that Berger was planning to sell it to a German collection in Munich for 60,000 Mark. In his book Berger claims the museum stated that such a sale to a foreign country would be unpatriotic and convinced him to take 12,000 Krone for it. Berger, *Die Tragödie der Kroatischen Textilhausindustrie*, 29.

¹⁶² For more information on earlier attempts to found a museum of ethnography in Zagreb see Muraj, "Zamisli Velimira Deželića st. o osnivanju Etnograskog muzeja u Zagrebu."

placed in already existing buildings of a much smaller scale. In addition to Berger's collection already installed there, the new museum received the archeology section of the National Museum, the textiles collection from the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt, and the ethnographic collection of the Croatian School Museum (Hrvatski školski muzej), and another larger Berger collection purchased by the National Museum.¹⁶³ The Etnografski muzej's permanent collection first opened to the public in 1922. Salamon Berger was the founding director until his retirement in 1925, after which he retained the title of honorary director and continued to organize domestic and international exhibits of cottage industry. Due to the lack of industrialization in the Croatian regions, Berger's cosmopolitan and economic approach to folk culture as economic goods lingered into the late 1920s at the Etnografski muzej and its exhibitions.

In historic accounts, Berger was often described with the adjective "cosmopolitan" or "European" but never described as a nationalist. Berger belonged to a milieu of cosmopolitan merchants and socialites, and in particular to a milieu of cosmopolitan Jews, in the Habsburg Monarchy whose identity was not described in terms of nations. Though historical accounts of the Etnografski muzej are not explicit on the point, Berger did consider himself a Croatian nationalist. He spent an enormous amount of time, energy, and wealth collecting folk textiles from the Croatian regions, but he showed no interest in nationalist rhetoric. Instead he is described in 1928 as a:

Self made man. That is the right term to describe S. Berger's personality. A man of insightful spirit, ambition and initiative, insuperable energy, untiring agility, solid character marked with a line of cosmopolitan tolerance of world cultural type, warm to everything that is good, beautiful and noble...¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Eckhel, *80 godina Etnografskog muzeja*.

¹⁶⁴ "S. Berger osnivač Hrv. Etnograskog Muzeja," *Svijet*, Feb 25 1928, 186. Another *Svijet* article from the time of his death describes Berger as a "European" who found his home in Zagreb. "Kao čovjek bijaše S. Berger pravi Evropejac. Gentleman. U društvenom saobraćaju neobično susretljiv, fin, pravi gospodin. Možda je bio rođen za neki velegradski, milijunski centar Europe ili Amerike, a mogao je i otići od nas, ali je Zagreb i Hrvatsku svojom

In no small part what is also at play here is the fact that Zagreb society, and even Berger himself, may not have considered Berger to be Croatian. Yugoslavia's ethnic diversity meant that identity in the county was often intrinsically linked with religion. Since Croat ethnic-national identity was (and still is) so firmly based in being Roman Catholic, being Jewish and being Croat were not necessarily perceived as being compatible.¹⁶⁵ Yet, both historic and recent accounts make Berger out to be a magnanimous benefactor of the museum: "...the Ethnographic Museum of Zagreb was founded in 1919, as a separate part of the Croatian National Museum, in this way, Mr. Berger handed over his huge collection to the state's hands in a generous gesture..."¹⁶⁶ However, Berger rarely donated his collections to museums. He sold them and he complained openly in his 1913 book about the low prices he received for them. For Berger, Croatian textiles were a means of financial income and his role as director brought him high social standing. His approach to collecting and displaying folk culture did not fit into the increasingly scientific ethnographic approach of Tkalčić nor did he care to locate those specific qualities of the Croatian nation in folk culture. Though he continued to plan exhibitions, he played an increasingly smaller role at the Etnografski muzej and the Zagrebački Zbor over the course of the 1920s.

pravom otačbinom." "Osnivač Hrvatskog etnografskog muzeja," *Svijet*, 20 January 1934. In interwar Zagreb, "European" was a word often used to describe the educated, well-traveled cosmopolitan. However, in his 1938 novel *On the Edge of Reason* (*Na rubu pameti*) author Miroslav Krleža mocked the way which those who most wanted to be labeled as such were conservative, small-minded, and ignorant of the plight of the lower classes. Miroslav Krleža, *On the Edge of Reason* [*Na rubu pameti*], translated by Zora Depolo (1938; repr., New York: New Directions Books, 1989)

¹⁶⁵ Generally scholars have reported that the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia, before 1940, was not marked by violent anti-Semitism, although social opportunities for Jews were not equal to those of regional ethnic majorities. The history is made more complicated by the fact that stances towards Jewish populations, which were largely concentrated in metropolises, varied greatly. The Bosnian Sephardim who had lived in Sarajevo for centuries were widely accepted, as were Serbian Jews because many of them had fought in World War I. In contrast, the Ashkenazim in Zagreb and other parts of Slavonia and Vojvodina, many of whom originally stemmed from other parts of Austria-Hungary but quickly learned to speak Croatian and assimilated culturally, religiously, and politically, were still considered outsiders. Violent anti-Semitism would be one of the several radical intolerances of the World War II Croatian fascist regime, the Ustaša. Ivo Goldstein, "The Jews in Yugoslavia 1918–1941: Antisemitism and the Struggle for Equality," *Jewish Studies at the CEU II* (1999–2001).

¹⁶⁶ "S. Berger osnivač Hrv. Etnografskog Muzeja," 187.

It is Berger who provides some insight here into Vanka's identity and approach to folkloric imagery. Vanka was an illegitimate child of Habsburg nobility, received a German-language education, attended the Academy in Brussels, and was well-traveled. Like Berger he was raised as a member of the last generation of the Habsburg cosmopolitan elite, and like others in this milieu he valued folk culture for non-nationalistic reasons. For Vanka it was not financial gain or social status that drew him to folk culture, but I would argue an interest in improving the social and economic status of lower rural classes—an idea already widely touted by the Croatian Peasant Party since the turn of the twentieth century.

Vanka's lingering applied arts approach towards folk culture can be seen by examining his participation in one of Berger's last exhibitions that perpetuated the cosmopolitan and economic approach to Croatian folk arts. It was put on in conjunction with the tenth annual Zagreb Trade Fair (Zagrebački Zbor) in 1928.¹⁶⁷ The Zagrebački Zbor, which is the name given both to a set of fairgrounds within the city of Zagreb and to the trade fairs that took place here two to three times a year, was an important Yugoslav economic space in the decades leading up to World War II and enduring through the initial years of the war.¹⁶⁸ Vanka, together with Zdenka Sertić, an artist and educator working with the Etnografski muzej, created the poster for the fall trade fair that year.¹⁶⁹ The 1928 poster, like many of those that came after, was aimed at

¹⁶⁷ The first exhibition of folk art (Izložba pučke umjetnosti i narodnih rukotvorina) at the Zagreb Trade Fair took place the year before in 1927. That exhibition had not been organized by the Etnografski muzej, but rather by artist and professor Marko Rašica, and did not receive as much press as the 1928 exhibition. However, it seemed to set the model for the next year by also focusing on textiles and containing live presentations of craft making. See "Prva izložba pučke umjetnosti i narodnih rukotvorina u Zagrebačkom zboru," *Svijet*, 11 April 1927, 492, 498-99.

¹⁶⁸ It was a relatively small fair in terms of European fairs, averaging between 600 and 700 exhibitors for the international fall trade fairs. Beginning in the late 1920s, Germany and Austria always supplied the largest percentage of both foreign exhibitors and visitors to the fair, as the Zagrebački Zbor allowed an opportunity to tap into the Southeast-European market.

¹⁶⁹ Zdenka Sertić is another under-researched artist who had a long career working primarily with the curators and educators at the Etnografski Muzej in Zagreb. Her illustrations of folk culture, often produced in the flat graphic style seen in this poster, were stylized for simplicity but conveyed a large amount of information about folk dress and culture.

bringing both domestic and international audiences to the fair. In order to advertise throughout the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes it was printed in Serbo-Croatian, in both Latin and Cyrillic, as well as translated into Slovenian. To advertise abroad, it was printed in French, German, and English.¹⁷⁰ The poster highlighted the special exhibition of folk handicraft (*Izložba narodnih radova*) that took place in conjunction with the regular fall trade fair in 1928. Vanka not only helped design the poster, he was also on the organizing committee for this special exhibition, and nestled among the embroidered aprons and woven rugs that filled the exhibition was Vanka's 1925 painting *Zagorje Bride*, which depicted a bride in folk dress preparing for her wedding.¹⁷¹ The special committee organizing the exhibition read as a who's who list of prominent Zagreb museum directors and society women headed by Salamon Berger.¹⁷²

The exhibition filled twenty rooms of a newly built economic-commercial school just across from the fair grounds. It was divided into two parts, neither of which represented new, scientific approaches to ethnographic collecting. The first section was composed of private collections and Berger's exhibition for the 1925 Paris International Exhibition. This section included mostly historic embroidered and woven textiles such as folk dress and carpets. Vanka's *Zagorje Bride* was on display in this section because it was located in a private collection

¹⁷⁰ A black and white version even appeared on the cover of the Berlin magazine *Europa auf Reisen*. "Volkskunst-Ausstellung und X. Messe in Zagreb (Agram)," *Europa auf Reisen: Die Zeitschrift der Eleganten Reisewelt*, 17 August 1928. Zagrebački Zbor papers, DAZG 251–ZZ–SIG 187, Državni Arhiv u Zagrebu.

¹⁷¹ Antun Jiroušek, "Izložba narodnih radova na Zagrebačkome zboru: Sabirači naših narodnih radova," *Obzor*, 3 September 1928. This painting is now located in the hallway of the Zagreb City Hall (Gradska Skupština) near St. Mark's Square, where many couples go to get married. I am grateful to Andrijana Tadić at the offices of the Zagreb City Hall (Gradska skupština) for providing information on the location of this wedding and the identification of the church.

¹⁷² The committee was headed by Berger, who was now honorary director of Etnografski muzej. In the role of his deputy was Ignjat Fischer, a respected architect (see Chapter 4), vice president of the Zagrebački zbor organizing committee, of whom Vanka painted a portrait. The exhibition committee also included Vladimir Tkalčić, current director of the Etnografski muzej; Antun Jiroušek, a supporter of Vanka's work and current director of the Muzej za umjetnost i obrt; Vanka represented the Academy of Arts: President Milić and Director Dragomanović from the travel agency "Putnik," Mrs. Ženka Kopač-Frangeš from the Women's Society (Ženska Udruga) in Zagreb, and Mrs. Mudrinić, from the Women's Society in Petrinja. "Izložba narodnih radova na Zagrebačkom Zboru," *Novosti*, 29 June 1928.

belonging to Mrs. Maksi (Maxi) Mogan.¹⁷³ The second section was the work of the Women's Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Croatian Peasant Art and Domestic Craft in Zagreb and Petrinjska and was meant to encapsulate living folk art.¹⁷⁴ The weavings, pottery, embroidery, and jewelry on display in this section were for sale and practicing rural craftswomen were invited to demonstrate their crafts in person.¹⁷⁵ The historic exhibition was meant to educate the public - both domestic and foreign - about the handicraft of the Yugoslav peasant in order to encourage them to work towards its rejuvenation and preservation. This went hand-in-hand with what I would argue is the main purpose for Berger and the women's groups: to bring the rural craftswoman into contact with an urban market and thus improve her socio-economic standing.¹⁷⁶ "She" is the fitting pronoun because again and again the media surrounding this exhibition emphasized the importance of the female peasant, *seljakinja*, in creating and preserving folk art.

Vanka and Sertić's design for the 1928 poster was in line with the growing prominence of folk motifs in the posters in the first decades of the Zagreb trade fair. The posters for the several fairs that took place before World War I depicted romanticized images of peasants in a fin-de-siècle secessionist style, shown decorating the fair space or engaged in handicraft. After the First

¹⁷³ Maksi Mogan's home collection, including Vanka's *Zagorje Bride*, was described and photographed in "Salon ljubiteljice narodnog veziva," *Ženski list* VI, no. 5 (1930).

¹⁷⁴ Ženska udruga za očuvanje i promicanje hrvatske seljačke umjetnosti i kućnoga obrta, also known as Gospojinska udruga za očuvanje narodnog veziva. See "Naše narodno vezivo," *Ženski List* 1, br. 4 (July 1925): 19-20.

¹⁷⁵ Originally, the exhibition was also to be accompanied by a performance of the peasant singing group "Matija Gubec," which would unite hundreds of singers from all of Croatia and provide a living display of folk dress. This was canceled because of the death of Stjepan Radić and other Croatian Peasant Party members due to a shooting in the Yugoslav Parliament in Belgrade.

¹⁷⁶ For the best understanding of the intent of the exhibition organizers see newspaper articles published by members of the organizing committee: a series of six articles by Antun Jiroušek, the director of the Museum of Arts and Crafts, published in the newspaper *Obzor* and a review of the exhibition published by Vanka's co-artist for the poster, Zdenka Sertić in *Jutarnji List*. Antun Jiroušek, "Izložba narodnih radova na Zagrebačkom zboru," *Obzor*, 2-4, 6, 8, 10 September 1928; Zdenka Sertić, "Osvrt na izložbu narodnih radova na Zagrebačkom Zboru," *Jutarnji List*, 11 September 1928.

World War, posters from 1924 and 1925 utilized abstract folkloric patterning to create thick borders around silhouettes of the Zagreb skyline. These give way in 1926 and 1927 to a more explicitly powerful picturing of figures in folk dress who, like Vanka and Sertić's *seljakinja*, dominate the pictorial space that they inhabit. In the 1926 poster, the artist has carefully foregrounded the strength of an older peasant man who squeezes a bunch of grapes directly into a wine jug. In Željko Hegedušić's 1927 poster, a giant towers over the entrance building to the fairgrounds.¹⁷⁷

Vanka prepared at least five preparatory studies for this poster (figs. 2.18-22).¹⁷⁸ The trade fair that year also included an exhibition of livestock, and so the studies and final poster show male and female figures in folk dress guiding livestock. In these early studies they parade single-file across the page in profile with humans and livestock drawn on the same scale, but almost all the studies include a prominently foregrounded female figure in boldly floral folk dress with a bountiful basket balanced on her head. These figures were based on peasant women, like Vanka's wet nurse Dora Jugova, from the regions surrounding Zagreb who walked to Zagreb in the early morning to sell milk, eggs, and produce, often wearing the folk dress of their villages. In this context, folk dress helped advertise the freshness of their goods. Describing the Zagorje region of Vanka's upbringing in *Cradle of Life*, Adamic remarked on these women:

Of the hundreds of peasants and peasant women and girls who come to the Zagreb market-places every weekday morning, and more especially on Wednesday and Saturdays, some of the handsomest, wearing clean, colorful homespun costumes, are from hamlets and villages 'beyond the mountain.' They come afoot from distances of from one to two hours, bringing into town their baby pigs and lambs,

¹⁷⁷ In 1932, Vanka painted a set of murals in the Gradski podrum with Željko Hegedušić and several other painters. For more on this see Chapter 4.

¹⁷⁸ All of the studies discussed here were located among Vanka's scrapbooks and papers (either in the family archive in Rushland, Pennsylvania or in the papers that the family donated to the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences, Zagreb), which together with their drawing style make it appear that Vanka drew all of these studies, but it is not clear if they were conceived alone or in consultation with Sertić.

turkeys, geese, ducks, and chickens; eggs, butter, and vegetables. In most cases this is the family's basic or sole source of monetary income.¹⁷⁹

For their final version Vanka and Sertić purposefully selected this image of the female peasant as the central figure, enlarged her scale in respect to the other figures, and rotated her to face the viewer. The *seljakinja* holds aloft two wreaths each encircling a Z—the double Z being the trademark of the Zagrebački Zbor. The women at her feet still hold baskets on their heads and the man holds a scythe, but the central figure now wears a traditional wedding headdress based on the one in Vanka's 1925 *Zagorje Bride*. Such headdresses were common to areas around Bistra in Zagorje, and Vanka carefully replicated the striped geometric pattern in red and black specific to Bistra folk dress in his painting. However, for the poster these two artists associated with the ethnographic museum transformed the folk dress into something fantastical—it seems to include exaggerated elements of folk dress from several regions of Croatia and perhaps even Serbia and cannot be pinpointed to any one specific location.¹⁸⁰ This makes sense since the exhibition was not aiming to be a scientific display of distinct Croatian folk culture. It actually contained handicrafts from Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia.¹⁸¹ These early Zagreb trade fair posters never use the word Croatian—*hrvatski*—and only sometimes the ambiguous word folk—*narodni*.¹⁸² In a similar way, the artists also replaced the cascade of floral ribbons coming from the headdress in Vanka's *Zagorje Bride* with ribbons in red, white, and blue—echoed in the

¹⁷⁹ Adamic, *Cradle of Life*, 4. Describing how Vanka's wet nurse regularly walked over Medvednica Mountain in order to sell her goods in the Zagreb market, Adamic wrote, "In the summer, Dora set out soon after daybreak, balancing a huge round basket on her head, carrying another basket on one arm and a bundle on the other." Ibid., 34.

¹⁸⁰ The wedding headdress seems to be based on that worn around the Zagorje region north of Zagreb, the floral pattern is based on folk dress in the Pokuplje region around Sisak and Moslavina, and the black waistcoat is rarely seen in Croatian folk dress, though sometimes in the Pokuplje region, but it figures prominently in Serbian folk dress.

¹⁸¹ It should be noted that many Croatians at the time considered Bosnia and its culture to be part of Croatia.

¹⁸² Before this, words like "*narodni*" or "*naš*" (for example, "*naše drvo*") stand in as a word ambiguous enough to be read as folk, Croatian, or Yugoslavian.

flags—which could be read as Yugoslav or Croatian.¹⁸³ Like Tkalčić, they purposely occupy an ambiguous space between.

In a review, Vanka's colleague Sertić connected the exhibition of folk handicraft with the political movement around the Croatian Peasant Party, although she too never uses the word Croatian: "...among us folk works are not remotely as known and popular as could be expected with regard to the popularity of the peasant movement."¹⁸⁴ She also purposely distinguished their efforts from those of ethnographers by urging readers to regard folk culture as living:

It is not necessary to ask the already familiar question about the decline and extinction of folk art and folk works. It is more important to ask the question, can that, which still lives in our nation, still be saved and in what way. Folk art is a lively and integral part of our folk culture and national history.¹⁸⁵

Vanka and Sertić's approach to folk culture in this exhibition and in their poster closely aligned with an applied arts view of folk culture as living culture. However, if applied arts museums had used this approach to push imperial unity and improve middle-class taste and Berger used it for economic and social advancements, Vanka and Sertić had a different motivation. In their poster, the massive figure's billowing skirt serves almost as a shield for the parade of peasant men and women at her feet. It was for these rural lower classes that Vanka and Sertić make a political statement about the economic plight of the peasant, by participating in an exhibition that carried on Kršnjavi's view of folk art as a profitable and distinctly Croatian economic product. That year's fair also contained a display by agricultural professor Oto Frangeš in the Zagrebački Zbor

¹⁸³ Croatian flags past and present have consisted of horizontal stripes of (from top to bottom) red, white, and blue. Both Yugoslavian flags shuffled the order of the horizontal stripes (from top to bottom) blue, white, and red.

¹⁸⁴ "Ako se uvaži činjenica, da kod nas narodni radovi ni izdaleka nisu tako poznati i popularni, kako bi se moglo očekivati obzirom na popularnost seljačkoga pokreta, onda ne [should probably read se] svakako mora pothvat Zagrebačkog Zbora i njegove izložbe narodnih rukotvorina pozdraviti." Zdenka Sertić, "Osvrt na izložbu narodnih radova na Zagrebačkom Zboru," *Jutarnji List* (Zagreb), 11 September 1928.

¹⁸⁵ Sertić also talks openly about a different, non-ethnographic way of viewing this folk art. "...every observer, who did not approach these subject with the analytical viewpoint of ethnography, stayed foremost purely under the impression of painterly effects." Sertić, "Osvrt na izložbu narodnih radova na Zagrebačkom Zboru."

about much needed agricultural reform.¹⁸⁶ It informed viewers that the 1 to 4 hectares received by the average Croatian settler was much smaller than the average minimum of other European countries and indeed too small to create an economically strong peasant.¹⁸⁷ Many saw the fact that Croatian peasants owned only small plots of land as the root of Croatian impoverishment. On this topic, Adamic also provided an informative illustration in *Cradle of Life*:

The soil is for the most part clay and reddish loam, but every square foot, that can be, is utilized. It must be. Even the few *bogaté* or ‘rich’ families, have but from fifteen to twenty acres, while for every one such family there are fifty who own but two, three acres, and many less than that.¹⁸⁸

These small tracts of land could not produce enough to pay the taxes, debt, and church dues owed regularly by rural peasants. The Zagreb trade fair became a venue in which to secure political rights for rural populations within Yugoslavia, and Vanka and Sertić’s poster helped make a case for this strong, empowered peasant.

Also visible in these studies for the 1928 Zagrebački zbor poster, but not in the finalized design, are the hilltop churches that dominated Vanka’s work on the ethnographic expedition five years earlier. They appear in some form in the background of each drawing, but in two in particular repeating hilltop churches fill the background (figs. 2.18 and 2.22). Images of rural churches likely served as both a personal and national symbol for the artist. In *Cradle of Life*, Adamic commented on the prevalence of such hilltop churches in the Zagorje landscape and described Vanka’s impression of his first mass in the rural Zagorje town of his upbringing as “an extraordinary, breath-taking performance.”¹⁸⁹ These hilltop churches also served as a reminder of

¹⁸⁶ “X. Zagrebački Zbor,” *Novosti*, 26 August 1928. See also Arčabić, *Zagrebački zbor*, 88.

¹⁸⁷ One hectare equals .01 square kilometers or 2.47 acres.

¹⁸⁸ Adamic, *Cradle of Life*, 4.

¹⁸⁹ Describing the Zagorje region Adamic wrote, “Townlets, villages, and hamlets lie tucked and hidden in swales, gulleys, and ravines, while on wellnigh every other or third knoll is a small steepled church with a walled-in graveyard.” *Ibid.*, 3. “Dazed by the color and beauty before me, I barely heard her. Behind the altar was a saffron-colored window with the Eye of God painted on it, framed in a triangle; and through the window the sun poured in,

the deeply religious nature of village life in Croatia, and the largely Roman Catholic identity of Croatia, in contrast to the primarily Eastern Orthodox Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia. However, his use of symbols like the hilltop church and monumental peasant woman are part of the reason that Vanka's works were never purely ethnographic and would never be fully accepted in the increasingly ethnic- and nationalist-based ethnography of the interwar period.

2.4 BETWEEN ECONOMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHIC

This chapter has shown how Vanka's early twentieth-century folkloric works coincided with a period of transition for the display of Croatian folk culture in museums and exhibitions. Tracing this history of display has shed light on why Vanka's works were not initially perceived as nationalist before the fall of the Habsburg Monarchy, though they would be a decade later. Folk culture from the Croatian regions first appeared in exhibitions of applied arts and early ethnographic study in the late-nineteenth-century Dual Monarchy. Here Croatian folk culture was most often exhibited as "cottage industry," emphasizing the production of economically competitive goods for the empire and attempting to guide middle-class taste by means of a discourse about the inherent aesthetic values of folk art. In a period when both Viennese and Zagreb museums were using Croatian folk culture in official exhibitions meant to represent the Empire, images of Croatian folk culture, like Vanka's, were not produced or received as subversive to the Habsburg Monarchy. Only after World War I, when these folk collections were moved to ethnographic museums that codified scientific classification in the name of

embracing the statue of Saint George in the center of the altar....The mass—with the priest running this way and that, and the altar boys moving briskly about him, answering his chants and prayers in an incomprehensible language and jingling the bells—was an extraordinary, breath-taking performance." Ibid., 57.

increasingly ethnic-based nationalist projects, did Vanka's works begin to take on new meaning as celebratory of Croatian national culture.

Though they share ethnographic qualities, Vanka's Habsburg understanding of ethnography was increasingly at odds with the new interwar generation of ethnographers who wanted to document and classify the last remaining examples of folk culture. *Zagorje Bride* was the last painting of its kind in Vanka's repertoire. He continued to paint images of folk culture after 1925. But he produced no more of these large-scale works focused on the materiality of folk culture painted in a Western-European academic naturalism. Instead, as will be explored in Chapter 4, by the early 1930s he cultivated an expressionist style in his painted works and began to depict superstitious folk rituals instead of exactly rendered folk craft. With the rise of nationalist ethnography, critics began to label Vanka's works as nationalist starting in 1923, by which time Vanka had already started turning away from such ethnographic images of folk culture. Vanka sought out appreciation for Croatian folk culture and folk arts in order to stimulate economic development for rural populations, but his paintings never sought to bring political borders in line with cultural borders. This fact will be further underlined by the discussion of Vanka's contributions to interwar Croatian magazines that follows in Chapter 3. Vanka's images of strong and engaged peasants treated folk art as living and changing and able to be taught to new generations.

3.0 PEASANTS AT THE NEWS KIOSK: NATIONALISM, ETHNICITY AND THE CROATIAN PEASANT IN INTERWAR MASS MEDIA

Looking at the cover illustrations of the popular interwar Zagreb women's magazine *Ženski list* (*Women's Paper*) in the late 1920s and early 1930s, one would be led to believe that the magazine's typical reader was a fashionably modern woman. She changed her outfit frequently but always wore her short brown hair in a fashionably coifed *bubikopf*. She was active, or at least she aspired to be—skiing every winter, visiting the seashore every summer, fishing and sailing, and frequently stopping her new automobile to check her map. Since the founding of the magazine in 1925, the covers of *Ženski list* had been dedicated to images of this fashionable new woman out and about. When Vanka's painting *Zagorje Bride* (*Zagorska nevjesta*, 1925) appeared on the cover of *Ženski list* in December 1929 it presented quite a contrast, replacing this new woman with a bride in traditional folk dress. It was the first cover depicting folk culture since the magazine's founding in 1925, but illustrations and articles featuring Croatian folk culture had already appeared in the magazine's contents several times in the years leading up to this.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, by 1929 Vanka's *Zagorje Bride* may already have been known to many in Zagreb. As discussed in Chapter 2, the painting had been included in an exhibition of folk handicraft (*Izložba narodnih radova*) held at the 1928 Zagreb Trade Fair and circulated as a

¹⁹⁰ Vanka's cover started a sporadic tradition of featuring images of Croatian folk culture on the cover of December (Christmas) issued in the following years. The exceptional nature of the holidays was certainly part of the reason for the break with their typical imagery.

color-reproduction on postcards and calendars.¹⁹¹ On the *Ženski list* cover, a cropped version of Vanka's painting eliminated the bystanders in this wedding scene, focusing the reader's attention on a half-length depiction of a bride in the traditional folk dress of the Zagorje region north of Zagreb.¹⁹² Now the viewer could see clearly her bridal crown composed of red artificial flowers and feathers with a thick mane of ornate floral ribbons flowing from it, and her stacked beaded necklaces—all of which served as symbols of wealth and linked the bride to natural motifs.¹⁹³ The long floral ribbons next draw the viewer's eyes down to the bride's hands, one of which subtly presented the viewer with a rosy apple into which a tall sprig of rosemary has been fixed—a traditional symbol of fertility, health, and beauty.¹⁹⁴ In an article inside the issue, journalist and editor Olga Baldić-Bivec also noted this detail:

...when he [Vanka] places rosemary in the apple with brides and breathes soul into their faces, then a great love can be seen, which binds him with our regions and with meadows and fields sprinkled with the light green of spring. From all of his paintings flows great warmth, feelings, which connect him with the dear earth and our peasant.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Vanka had helped organize the 1928 exhibition of folk culture at the Zagrebački Zbor, and his painting *Zagorje Bride* had been included in the exhibition amongst the folk embroideries that made up Maksi Mogan's personal collection. In an article, Antun Jiroušek called *Zagorje Bride* "the crown" of Maksi Mogan's collection. Antun Jiroušek, "Izložba narodnih radova na Zagrebačkome zboru: Sabirači naših narodnih radova," *Obzor*, 3 September 1928. See Chapter 2 for more on this exhibition.

¹⁹² Vanka was probably actively involved in cropping this image, since certain elements from the original that should be visible, like a jug and glass being handed to the bride near her left elbow, have been erased from this version.

¹⁹³ Such crowns (*krune*) were often worn by brides in central Croatia and were constructed from a hodgepodge of beads, artificial flowers, sequins, metal spirals, or bits of glass. Red was often one of the main colors used in these bridal headdresses as it was thought to protect the bride from evil. In northwestern Croatia specifically, where Bistra is located, it was customary for a large number of ribbons to hang from the headdress as we see in Vanka's painting. Note that these are modern mass-produced goods being integrated into traditional folk culture. Vesna Zoric, "Hairdressing and Headgear," in *Croatian Folk Culture at the Crossroads of Worlds and Eras*, ed. Zorica Vitez and Aleksandra Muraj (Zagreb: Gallery Klovicevi dvori, 2000), 244.

¹⁹⁴ The apple played a key role in Croatian wedding traditions; the bride had to accept an apple from the groom in order to accept the marriage proposal, and it was a common present in the gift-giving rituals that took place on the wedding day. Frances Babic and Branka Malinar, *Maiden Mother, Woman of Wisdom: Wedding Traditions Folk Dress* (Eastlake, OH: Croatian Heritage Museum & Library, 2010), 21.

¹⁹⁵ "...kad nevjestama u jabuku stavlja ružmarin i udahnjuje im dušu u lice, onda se tek vidi velika ljubav, koja ga veže uz naše krajeve uz livade i polja tek posuta lakim zelenilom proljeća. Iz sviju njegovih slika izbija velika toplina, osjećaji, koji njega vežu uz dragu zemlju i našeg seljaka." Olga Baldić-Bivec, "Maksimilijan Vanka," *Ženski list* 5, no. 12 (December 1929): 16.

Baldić-Bivec deeply romanticized Vanka's ability to reveal so much in his folkloric works about "our" culture. The editor related so keenly to the subject of Vanka's painting that she declared, "We ourselves are his brides, his women and peasants, because every twitch of the face, in every gesture of the hand, in every fold of our beautiful folk dress breathed something of his, something of ours."¹⁹⁶ Indeed, in the magazine's edited version of the painting, the bride was presented to viewer as if the reader were looking at her own reflection in a mirror. The cover was asking the Croatian woman to imagine herself this month not as a new and urban woman, but rather as a carrier of traditional Croatian folk culture.

The article was an opportunity to highlight Vanka's deep empathy for Croatian folk culture and tease out the symbols of the Croatian nation within it. However, the feature was not just encouraging readers to view Vanka's work romantically and passively. *Ženski list* was also offering its readers their first ever "folk embroidery" ("*narodni gobelin*") based on Vanka's recent painting *Spring Blessing* (*Proljetni blagoslov*, c. 1928-29).¹⁹⁷ Bemoaning the fact that their readers produced such beautiful embroideries, but were forced to use foreign-made mass-produced patterns, the editors had commissioned a local professor of embroidery to convert Vanka's painting into an embroidery pattern.¹⁹⁸ Readers could send 10 dinars to the publisher to receive the embroidery pattern for Vanka's painting. Depicted in a color lithograph in the

¹⁹⁶ "Njegove nevjeste, njegove žene i seljaci mi smo sami, jer je u svaki trzaj lica, u svaki pokret ruke, u svaki nabor lijepe naše narodne nošnje udahnuo nešto svog, nešto našeg." Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ It is unclear if this work is still extant. Although Vanka based one of his murals in the St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church on this painting, there is not a painted version of this work in his estate. In contrast, Vanka brought *Our Mothers 1914-1918* (*Naše Majke 914.-918.*) with him to the United States, on which he based another of the Millvale Murals. In her list of Vanka's works and their locations, independent researcher Vanda Antolović Lovrenčić reported that a painting by the same name was owned by the Balić Family, Gundulićeva 23/II. I was not able to confirm this. The painting was offered to the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1953, but not acquired by the institution. According to the paperwork for that offer, now located in the Archive of Fine Arts in Zagreb, the painting was purchased in 1942 by Rudolf Paškvan from Dra. Novak along with a house at Buconjićeva 2, Zagreb.

¹⁹⁸ Terezija Paulić, professor at the Zagreb Vocational School (Zagrebačka stručna škola) made the pattern. The article reported she had studied embroidery abroad for several years. Baldić-Bivec, "Maksimilijan Vanka," 18.

magazine, Vanka's painting *Spring Blessing* depicts a farming family in the field praying before sharing a meal together. Before them the viewer's eyes are drawn to the figure of Mary who, in an embodiment of the family's piety, glides across the field sowing seeds. In the wake of her footsteps the dark plowed field turns a spring green. The secondary focal point is the embroidery on the man and woman's folk dress.¹⁹⁹ Five months later in May 1930 *Ženski list* featured a photograph of the first completed embroidery based on Vanka's painting.²⁰⁰ Despite being the caretaker of her home and her two children, Zora Pleše of Zagreb had spent the intervening months working hard to complete the embroidery.

Vanka's embroidery pattern had a particular power to transform women from passive viewers of his images into active participants in the making of the image and thus participants in the imagining of national identity. This active imagining was another type of modern role that the magazine could encourage Yugoslav women to assume, quite different from the illustrated female driver with the *bubikopf* in the latest fashions. In this chapter, I will leave behind the shift in museum and exhibition practice that occurred after World War I explored in Chapter 2, and instead focus on the context of mass media in the Croatian regions during politically tumultuous period of the late 1920s and early 1930s. However, this chapter's exploration of Vanka's contribution to two popular publications continues to support the thesis, put forward in Chapter 2, that Vanka took an applied arts approach to Croatian folk culture in his artworks, viewing it as something living and changeable and able to be integrated into the everyday lives of contemporary people. By producing embroideries for *Ženski list* in 1929 and 1930, he took part

¹⁹⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 2, Vanka appears to have copied the embroidery design on the woman's vest almost verbatim from an illustration that Zdenka Sertić had produced for an ethnographic article on the folk dress of the area around Medvednica. Vladimir Tkalčić, "Seljačke nošnje u području Zagrebačke gore," *Narodna starina* 4, no. 10 (November 1924).

²⁰⁰ "Prvi narodni Gobelin," *Ženski list* 6, no. 5 (May 1930): 8.

in a cultural movement around the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka*, hereafter HSS) that attempted to bring attention and dignity to rural populations by encouraging contemporary women to integrate traditional folk culture into their everyday lives.

3.1 MODERNITY AND MAGAZINES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

While in the Western media the Yugoslav regions were often perceived as wild, uncharted backcountry throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one had only to look to the lavishly illustrated covers of *Svijet (World)* for visual and textual evidence of the cultural modernity of interwar life in the Croatian metropolis. One such cover from 23 July 1932 provides what may have been a common scene on Ban Jelačić Trg, the main square of Zagreb: Two young women in the latest fashions occupy a table in the outdoor seating area of the Gradska Kavana (City Café) with its steel-tube Mies van der Rohe chairs. They take part in the urban café setting, coyly glancing at the other occupants of this modern space, including the viewer. Editor and illustrator Otto Antonini provided the journal with art deco style in step with the popular imagery of Paris, Berlin, and New York.²⁰¹

Examining mass media is vital for understanding modernity in Central and Eastern Europe. Although much of the scholarship has a tendency to describe the Yugoslav regions of the early twentieth century as backwards, it is more productive to seek out how modernity established itself in a different way without some of the traditional markers of modernity in Western Europe. Interwar Yugoslavia was considerably less industrialized than Western Europe.

²⁰¹ Art deco had a big impact on the art, architecture, decorative arts, and fashions in the 1920s in Zagreb. See the recent exhibition catalog Anđelka Galić and Miroslav Gašparović, eds., *Art Déco and Art in Croatia Between the Two Wars* (Zagreb: Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb, 2011).

Both 1921 and 1931 Yugoslav census results reveal that about 80 percent of the population considered themselves agricultural or forest workers, i.e. peasants. From that, nearly 70 percent of landowning peasants still had small plots of less than 12 acres which could barely sustain their families.²⁰² Even in those regions of Central and Eastern Europe that lacked an abundance of modern industry and large urban populations, modern print media established itself in the mid-nineteenth century as one of those markers of modernity that emerged even on the periphery of European industrialization. *Svijet* and *Ženski list* reveal how the printing presses kept pace with the rest of Europe in the spread of modern political ideas and modern aesthetics. In addition, mass print media existed alongside other forms of modern mass experience that persisted despite the lack of industry. As the *Svijet* cover described above reveals, the new, modern urban environment of Zagreb included more public spaces for leisure experiences, which were seemingly open to all classes. In addition to cafes, the urban landscape became dotted with cinemas built into the courtyard of existing buildings and large new department stores.²⁰³ Government funds had established modern museum institutions discussed in Chapter 2.

Mass media publications were an important facet of modern and modernizing impulses in Central and Eastern Europe including nationalism. Beginning in the Habsburg Empire and continuing through the interwar period, producing Croatian-language mass publications was a political act in itself. Standardization of spoken and written language was often among the first tasks of European nationalists. This was certainly the case with Zagreb's first nationalist movement, the Illyrians, who pushed for Yugoslavism in the early 1800s by standardizing a

²⁰² Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 64. As Djilas points out interwar agrarian reform failed to change this situation and in 1931, 67.8 percent of landowners still owned less than 12 acres, another 29.3 percent less than 50 acres.

²⁰³ For more on the modernization of Zagreb's urban landscape see Eve Blau and Ivan Rupnik, *Project Zagreb: Transition as Condition, Strategy, Practice* (Barcelona: Actar, 2007).

written form of the štokavian dialect using the Latin alphabet for print publications.²⁰⁴ In the Habsburg Empire, language was a divisive issue. It was often the means by which nationalisms within the Empire were expressed and managed. By allowing regions on the periphery of the Empire to dictate their own official languages of education and bureaucracy, the emperor hoped to provide just enough autonomy to quell nationalists.²⁰⁵ But in Croatia's growing metropolises, including Zagreb and Osijek, Austro-Hungarian bureaucrats and urban inhabitants favored fashionable German and Hungarian, while Croatian remained the language of rural peasants and servants. The fashionableness of German publications lingered into the interwar period, when the publishing of Croatian-language media took on both an economic and political imperative. Publications like *Svijet* and *Ženski list* competed with imported foreign language publications—particularly German, but also Austrian, Italian, French, Hungarian, and English—by openly adopting the model of popular German publications. Publications from Belgrade actually offered less competition because, despite the shared Serbo-Croatian language, they were usually printed in the Cyrillic alphabet that Croatians could not read as readily.

3.2 *SVIJET, ŽENSKI LIST, AND THE “CROATIAN QUESTION”*

What drew busy early-twentieth-century women to incorporate folkloric handicrafts into their homes and wardrobes? And what motivated an academically trained painter such as Vanka to

²⁰⁴ Significantly, the Illyrians were not specifically Croat nationalists. They choose the štokavian dialect because it was spoken by the majority of both Croats and Serbs. For more on this see Chapter 1.

²⁰⁵ Pieter Judson has compellingly argued that most inhabitants in the border regions of the Habsburg Empire, like Croatia, easily slipped between multiple languages and that in fact preferences for certain languages were more often attempts to have personal needs met rather than expressions of nationalist politics. Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

offer his artwork as a needlework pattern? The answers lie in the context of interwar Yugoslavian politics and popular media. Reproductions of Vanka's works and reviews of his exhibitions appeared numerous times between 1926 and 1934 in the illustrated weekly *Svijet* and the monthly women's magazine *Ženski list*, two of the most widely-circulated Croatian magazines of the interwar period, which will serve as the focus of this chapter.²⁰⁶ These dates are significant. My examination of *Svijet*, published 1926 to 1936, and *Ženski list*, published 1925 to 1944, reveal that Vanka's folkloric art was incorporated into a larger rise in imagery and content dealing with Croatian folk culture and folkloric motifs in both publications beginning in 1926 and tapering off in 1930.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, this increase in folkloric imagery was a reaction to the tumultuous political events of interwar Yugoslavia, the rising influence of the HSS, and the ongoing search for Croatian political autonomy—the so-called “Croatian question.”

One of the primary problems facing the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in the years after the war—but lingering throughout the interwar period—was an unresolved debate about whether the new state, headed by the Serbian monarchy, should be an extension of the existing Serbian state (thus fulfilling Greater Serbian aspirations) or a confederation of southern

²⁰⁶ "Iz hrvatske umjetnosti," *Svijet* 1, no. 7 (20 March 1926); "Izložba Maksimilijana Vanke u Salonu Ullrich od 7.-20. o. mj.," *Svijet* 5, no. 12 (15 March 1930); "Oproštajna Izložba Maksimilijana Vanke," *Svijet* 9, no. 14 (31 March 1934). "Salon ljubiteljice narodnog veziva," *Ženski list* VI, no. 5 (May 1930); "Prvi narodni Gobelin," "Naš narodni Gobelin," *Ženski list* 6, no. 12 (December 1930); "Izložba Maksimilijana Vanke," *Ženski list* 10, no. 4 (April 1934); Baldić-Bivec, "Maksimilijan Vanka."; Č, "Izložba Slika Maksimilijana Vanka," *Ženski list* 6, no. 4 (April 1930).

²⁰⁷ I arrived at this period of increased production of images of folk culture from 1927 to 1931 independently through my analysis of these magazines and other interwar media, but other scholars' research confirms that these were the most active years for organizations, events, and publications promoting the revival and preservation of folk culture. This was probably in large part due to the activities of *Seljačka sloga* (Peasant Harmony) during these years, which was a cultural organization associated with the HSS. See Karmela Kristić, "Seljačka sloga i narodna nošnja (u razdoblju od 1926. do 1929. i od 1935. do 1940. godine)," *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 14/15, no. 1 (2003); Suzana Leček, "Seljačka sloga i uključivanje žena u seljački pokret (1925.-1929.)," *Radovi - Zavod za hrvatsku povijest* 32-33 (1999-2000).

I am grateful to the librarians of the periodicals reading room in the Zagreb's main City Library (Gradska knjižnica), where I primarily viewed *Svijet*, and to the librarians of the periodicals reading room in the National and University Library (Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica u Zagrebu), where I viewed *Ženski list*.

Slavic nations on more equal terms.²⁰⁸ Politically, this translated to a debate between centralism and federalism which often, though not always, was divided along ethnic lines. Serbians, who had already had an independent state for decades and had fought with the Allies and suffered great losses in World War I, felt entitled to a version of the former. Croats and Slovenes, on the other hand, had long traditions of their own cultures and state apparatuses and had agreed to join with Serbia in hopes of greater political autonomy than they had received in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although Serbs constituted the largest portion of the population, no ethnic population constituted a majority of the new state, and similarly no idea about how the new state should be organized held a majority of supporters.²⁰⁹ To make matters worse, the secret Treaty of London, which had been used to get Italy to join the Allies, had promised large parts of Croatia's Adriatic coast to Italy if the Allies won the war. Croats felt Belgrade was not willing to defend their territorial claims. In response to these issues, the majority of Croat voters gave their political support to the HSS in the interwar period. Despite the fact that many of Yugoslavia's interwar politicians worked to find a Serb-Croat compromise, the political unification of South Slavs into one state after World War I increased the urgency of the "Croatian question" about the Croatian region's political sovereignty and would actually work to intensify Croatian nationalism rather than quell it.²¹⁰ These rising concerns about the political and geographic sovereignty of

²⁰⁸ The Kingdom of Serbia was established in 1882. Before that it had been a semi-autonomous principality within the Ottoman Empire since the Serbian Revolutions of 1804-1817.

²⁰⁹ Of the South Slavic nations included in the new kingdom, only Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were acknowledged. Smaller populations of Bosnian Muslims, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Germans, Hungarians, and Jews were included but rarely acknowledged as separate.

²¹⁰ The driving motivation behind most English-language histories of early twentieth-century Yugoslavia is to question how solidified Serb and Croat national identities were in the interwar period and whether a unified Yugoslav identity and state were ever possible. The foundational text concerning this question is Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). Countering Banac's suggestion that a Yugoslav state was destined to fail is Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). For a good concise introduction to the political history of interwar Yugoslavia and its competing visions of Yugoslavism see Dejan Djokić, "(Dis)integrating

Croatians within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes translated visually to a rise in Croatian folk imagery.

Svijet was one of these publications that featured illustrations of folk dress on its cover quite regularly during this period of growth of folk imagery. Published weekly from February 1926 to December 1936, *Svijet* was the first such weekly review in Croatia with copperplate illustrations and was the most popular illustrated magazine in interwar Zagreb. It included articles on entertainment, regional travel, women's fashion, music, film, theater, and art, and published works of serial fiction. The magazine was popular among both male and female interwar Croatian readers and certainly one of its main draws of the time were the many photographs of global events and spectacles culled from international news agencies and shown alongside photographs of local events and sights.²¹¹ However, the most striking feature of *Svijet* (and certainly its enduring legacy) were the illustrated covers produced by artist Otto Antonini (1892-1959), carried out in the current art deco style utilizing the visual vocabulary of Western European and American modernism.²¹² Antonini served as the primary editor of the magazine for only the first eighteen issues, but continued to produce illustrations for the front and often back covers until the end of 1932, and his vision certainly remained the enduring model for the

Yugoslavia: King Alexander and Interwar Yugoslavism," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst, 2003), 136-156.

²¹¹ The fact that circulation numbers were not included in Željka Kolveshi's recent exhibition catalog about *Svijet* for the Zagreb City Museum suggests that circulation numbers for this magazine are not extant or have not been located. It was published by Tipografija, which was one of the largest publishing houses in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, founded in Zagreb in 1920. Tipografija offered it at a discounted rate to the subscribers of its three influential daily newspapers, *Jutarnji list* (1912-1941), *Večer* (1920-1941), and *Obzor* (1920-1941, published in various forms since 1886). It is known that the two most popular newspapers, *Jutarnji list* and *Večer*, both had circulation numbers of around 30,000. Since *Svijet* was the most popular illustrated weekly publication its circulation numbers were likely even higher. Željka Kolveshi, *Otto Antonini: Zagreb i "Svijet" / "Svijet" i Zagreb dvadesetih...* (Zagreb: Muzej Grada Zagreba, 2007)

²¹² Antonini was born and raised in Zagreb to an Italian father and German mother, both of whom were artists. Though his nationality at birth was listed as Croat, he also received Italian citizenship after studying a year in Italy before World War I. Like Vanka and many of the powerful personalities in early twentieth-century Zagreb, Antonini is best understood as part of the former Habsburg cosmopolitan elite.

magazine's style and content.²¹³ Antonini's covers and those of his successors rarely dealt explicitly with political events. The majority of *Svijet* covers were dedicated to strikingly modern themes including fashion, technology, travel, leisure, and sports. Even though the illustrations and content of the weekly magazine presented light, superficial, and apolitical fare, Željka Kolveshi has speculated that Antonini's covers sometimes referred obliquely to current political events.²¹⁴

Folk culture was not nearly as regular a part of the cover illustrations of the monthly women's magazine *Ženski list* (*Women's Paper*) in this period from 1926 to 1930 as it was for *Svijet*. The December 1929 cover derived from Vanka's *Zagorje Bride* was one of the rare exceptions until the late 1930s. However, folk culture did find its way into the pages of the magazine in another form, namely handicrafts. *Ženski list*, which ran from 1925 to 1944, was the most widely distributed women's magazine in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II.²¹⁵ The first issue in April 1925 bore the tagline: "Fashion and linens for women. Fashion and

²¹³ Željka Kolveshi, *Otto Antonini: Zagreb i "Svijet" / "Svijet" i Zagreb dvadesetih...* (Zagreb: Muzej Grada Zagreba, 2007), 31-32. Probably Antonini was selected to create *Svijet* because he had established his own satirical illustrated magazine *Šišmiš* (*Bat*) from 1915 to 1917 (when Antonini was not yet 23) with collaborator Vladimir Rožankowski. It was filled with secessionist-style caricatures and cartoons drawn by Antonini and many contemporary artists. Vanka was acquainted with Antonini and probably contributed to the magazine, but because the illustrations were signed with pen names I was not able to identify Vanka's contribution(s).

²¹⁴ Kolveshi gives the 7 July 1928 *Svijet* cover as an example. She speculates that the contemplative mother figure who sits in shadow may be a reference to the recent death of three protesters in Zagreb over the shooting in the Belgrade parliament on 20 June 1928. *Ibid.*, 93.

²¹⁵ The magazine went through several name and editorial changes during the twenty-year span of its existence: *Ženski list za modu zabavu i kućanstvo* (April 1925-October 1934), *Ženski list* (November 1934-April 1938), *Novi ženski list* (May 1938-March 1939), *Hrvatski ženski list* (April 1939-December 1944). Marija Jurić Zagorka (1873-1957) was the main editor of the magazine until November 1938, when she was replaced by Sida Košutić (1902-1965).

Based on the locations that sent letters and pictures, the readership consisted of women mostly from Croatia (Zagreb, Dalmatia, and Slavonia), but also from Herzegovina and northeast Bosnia, and Slovenia. Circulation numbers are not known to be extant, but historian of communication Marina Vujnović wrote in her dissertation on *Ženski list* that circulation was probably 65,000-70,000 at its highest point. According to her it reached a broader audience than the Serbian *Žena i svet* (*Woman and the World*) which debuted in 1925 and reached 60,000 at its highest point. An important factor in the higher circulation of *Ženski list* than *Žena i svet* was that *Ženski list* was printed in the more commonly read Latin alphabet used in Croatia, Bosnia, and often in Serbia while *Žena i svet* was

linens for children. Handicraft. Entertainment. Housekeeping. An exactly crafted pattern for every clothing model can be obtained through order as well as patterns for handicraft.”²¹⁶ Walking a line between progressive values and domesticity, each issue contained a column on women's rights but also sections dedicated to cooking, childrearing, and housekeeping. Each month, much of the magazine was dedicated to the production of *ručni rad*—literally “hand work”— meaning handmade clothing and household items meant to be both practical and beautiful. Every issue included an insert with a sewing pattern for a featured clothing item. Important for this study will be looking at the way in which folkloric motifs were incorporated into crafts and the transformation this magazine underwent under fascist authorities at the end of the 1930s.

Like the museum exhibitions discussed in the previous chapter and the artworks that will be discussed in the next chapter, the mass media depictions of Croatian folk culture in *Svijet* and *Ženski List* were constructed images. They filtered through only those aspects of rural peasant life that served political, economic, or social agendas, often idealizing what were actually impoverished living conditions. They confirm Gellner’s argument that European nationalisms claim folk culture as their *raison d’être*, while simultaneously replacing it with new hybrid culture.²¹⁷ The constructed nature of images of folk culture allows us to ask an important set of questions about how folkloric imagery in popular media imagines the nation and other competing identities, how such imagery reflects changing political events, and whether and how they can provide agency to or remove agency from populations.

printed in Cyrillic script in which primarily Serbians were literate. Marina Vujnovic, *Forging the Bubikopf Nation: Journalism, Gender, and Modernity in Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 6.

²¹⁶ “Svakog mjeseca izlazi po jedan svezak: Moda i rublje za dame. Moda i rublje za djecu. Ručni rad. Zabava. Kućanstvo. Za svaki model dobiva se po narudžbi točno izradjen krojni uzorak kao i uzorci za ručni rad.” *Ženski list*, April 1925.

²¹⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

Rather than being homogeneous or simplistic, the mediated images of folk culture in *Svijet* and *Ženski list* reveal that nationalist ideology and its imagery shifted over the course of the interwar years in reaction to the changing political situation and in accordance with competing visions of the nation. In the rise of imagery from 1926 to 1930, I observed two major trends that will be analyzed in the following sections. First, there was a tendency to use illustrations that depict regionally-specific folk dress to define the border of the Croatian nation. This will be observed in Otto Antonini's often romanticized and symbolically-loaded cover illustrations of folk culture for *Svijet*. In contrast, many articles and photographs in the two magazines reveal a second tendency in which Croatian folkloric motifs were incorporated into popular fashion and crafts aimed at women—including Vanka's embroidery patterns. These features reveal that there was an active desire by many contemporary women to integrate such motifs into their everyday lives. Following the rise in folkloric imagery, the establishment of a royal dictatorship in interwar Yugoslavia in 1929 marked a notable shift to social realist imagery of folk culture and ultimately a decline in the appearance of folk imagery. During World War II, there was a final resurgence in images of folk culture on the cover of *Ženski list* under the Croatian fascist regime, the Ustaša.

This contrast between these trends of using folk culture to establish borders, on one hand, and using it to foster everyday fashion and craft, on the other, is striking. Recently the work of scholars like historian Pieter Judson and sociologist Rogers Brubaker have challenged the notion that mass media can represent personal experiences of identity. Brubaker posits that the media often pushes nationalist politics of governments and political parties, while having little to do

with how ethnicity is lived and enacted in the private everyday lives of real people.²¹⁸ The media presents a more authoritarian, top-down form of nationalism. Brubaker's distinction between mediated nationalism and personal experiences of ethnicity will be helpful for thinking through how these two very different approaches to depicting Croatian folk culture observed in *Svijet* and *Ženski list* operate.

3.3 THE HSS AND THE RISE OF MASS-MEDIA IMAGES OF THE PEASANT, 1926-1930

When the peasant majority in the Croatian region finally received universal male suffrage for the first time in the March 1920 elections of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, the HSS became the most popular party among voters in central Croatia and Slavonia.²¹⁹ Rejecting the bourgeois parties founded by their fellow Croat intelligentsia, Stjepan and Antun Radić had founded the Croatian People's Peasant Party (*Hrvatska pučka seljačka stranka*) in 1904 in order to bring the peasantry into political nationalism.²²⁰ Stjepan Radić often spoke of the cultural unity of Croats with the South Slavs, but his position towards how that unity should take political form changed over the course of the early twentieth century.²²¹ Like

²¹⁸ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²¹⁹ Universal male suffrage caused the bourgeois parties that had previously dominated Croatian politics, the Croatian Union and the Croatian Party of the Right, to lose power and unite with the HSS in a coalition.

²²⁰ In 1920 the party changed its name to the Croatian Republican Peasant Party (*Hrvatska republikanska seljačka stranka*) to emphasize its desire for Croatian political autonomy within Yugoslavia. In 1925, soon after the party ended its boycott of the parliament, it became the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*).

²²¹ It should be noted that the HSS was opposed to a unified state with Serbia, but never opposed to Serbs within a Croatian state. Antun Radić wrote in 1905: "We [Croats and Serb] are one nation, but we have two states: the Serbs the Serbian and the Croats the Croatian state. In our opinion, only a Croatian policy can be conducted in Croatia, that is, such a policy that works for [the interests of] the Croatian state, so that the Serbs in Croatia must work for

other agrarian parties in Central and Eastern Europe, the party's power stemmed in part from a deep divide between a small urban elite and the rural poor masses.²²² The writings of Stjepan and Antun Radić reveal a distinct understanding that the broad gap in the late Habsburg Monarchy between the urban upper classes and the masses of peasants was most visibly a sartorial difference. Thus in 1896 Stjepan, who would become the leader of the party, observed:

In Croatia even a foreigner notices at first glance that there are two peoples here: the gentlemen and the common people ...Everyone who wears a black coat has the right to the title of 'gentleman,' and only with this title can one in practice, in life, have any worth as a man. All the others...are 'peasants,' 'thick-headed,' 'cattle,' 'vulgar people,' or simply slaves, subjects.²²³

With the development of his ethnographic practices (discussed in Chapter 2), Antun Radić fought these previous attitudes by raising the dignity of folk culture in an urban context. In this way, he mobilized folk dress as an effective signifier for Croatian nationalism that overcame the large class and geographic boundaries that had served as stumbling blocks to earlier nationalisms.

The *Svijet* and *Ženski list* imagery does not belong specifically to the media produced by the HSS. However, the general revival of all things folk culture in the late 1920s was part of a larger "peasant movement" ("*seljački pokret*") that went hand-in-hand with the party's search for greater Croatian political autonomy within Yugoslavia and expanded social, economic, and political conditions for rural populations. The rise in mass media imagery of Croatian folk culture that I observed in *Svijet* and *Ženski list* is aligned with this larger peasant movement. In the mid 1920s several events happened that opened the door to this growing Croatian folk

this Croatian state for our common homeland." Quoted in Mark Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, the Croat Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization, 1904-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 104.

²²² Ibid., 62. At the first elections for the Belgrade Constituent Assembly in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, held 28 November 1920, the still largely rural following of the HSS was obvious. While they received 67.35 percent of the vote in the regions around Zagreb, they received only 6.77 percent of the votes within Zagreb. Ibid., 172.

²²³ Stjepan Radić quoted in *ibid.*, 62.

nationalism in Yugoslavia. First, in 1924, Stjepan Radić and his party finally recognized the Vidovdan Constitution (St. Vitus Day constitution), which had declared the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes a centralized parliamentary monarchy.²²⁴ This meant the HSS resumed active involvement in the Yugoslav parliament, which the party had boycotted since the passing of the constitution by simple majority in 1921. Croatian voices were once again being heard in the Belgrade parliament. Second, in 1925, Zagreb held a nationalist festival commemorating the thousandth anniversary of the ascension to the throne of the medieval King Tomislav, celebrated as the first Croatian King of the Triune Kingdom (Central Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia). King Aleksandar attended the festivities and thus signaled a measured amount of consent. Finally, the return of the HSS to parliament also increased the volatility of the Yugoslavian political scene. On 20 June 1928 a member of the leading Serbian party opened fire on the HSS in the parliament in Belgrade killing two HSS representatives and injuring Stjepan Radić, who died from his injuries two months later. Despite its usual apolitical stance, an illustration on the 18 August 1928 issue of *Svijet* commemorated the death of the much beloved politician. In the time leading up to and in the wake of Radić's death, which came to be seen as political martyrdom, *Svijet* cover images reveal this movement for political nationalism and this blossoming of folk imagery.

Images of Croatian peasants made up roughly 10% of the covers of *Svijet* over its roughly eleven-year run, and these were part of a larger body of imagery of powerful, strong peasants

²²⁴ The constitution had passed by a simple majority in the parliament on 28 June 1921. It was called the *Vidovdan* Constitution (St. Vitus Day constitution) because it fell on the Serb nationalist holiday memorialized as the anniversary of the lost battle of Kosovo in 1389. The HSS and the other largest opposition party had refused to vote. Thus the Vidovdan Constitution had not passed by the 60 percent dictated by the Corfu Declaration of 1917, in which the Yugoslav committee and the Kingdom of Serbia had declared their intention to form the new country together. That is why Stjepan Radić initially refused to acknowledge the legality of the constitution.

that emerged in Zagreb in the period from 1926 to 1930.²²⁵ The illustrated cover of *Svijet* on 1 January 1930 was emblazoned with a pitch for the magazine itself, exclaiming, “Everyone reads it! Everyone loves it!” Visualized in a diagonal line across the cover was a group of readers engrossed in the *Svijet* magazines held open before them. In the upper left appeared to be a family: a woman in pearls with a well-groomed man and a youthful, androgynous child. In the lower right was added a new woman, whose slick black bob and pouty lips were neutralized by the presence of a baby (because even babies read *Svijet*!). Significantly, nestled between these two groups in the center of the cover, is pictured a man and woman in folk dress. The details of their clothing, including the man’s small, rounded felt hat with its narrow brim and his red waistcoat, and the woman’s red headdress and multi-stranded coral necklace, marked them as from around Šestine, a community located on the side of Medvednica mountain above Zagreb, whose produce and dairy have long been staples of the Zagreb markets. Together this diverse group of readers formed a distinct line, a border we might even say. The *Svijet* cover visualizes Benedict Anderson’s idea that print media is one of the primary mediums by which communities began to conceive of themselves as unified, simultaneous communities.²²⁶ It captures clearly the desire of this community of readers to imagine itself as a modern, urban society centered around a national Croat folk culture, purposely bringing together the urban and the rural. Furthermore, the image highlights the simultaneity of modern urban culture coexisting alongside traditional folk culture in early-twentieth-century Croatian regions.

²²⁵ I counted 53 out of 567 covers depicting Yugoslav folk dress in the magazine’s eleven-year run. The vast majority of these 53 images were of Croatian folk dress. There were four images of Bosnian peasants, but for most early twentieth-century Croatians Bosnia belonged in their mental map of Croatia. One image showed Slovenian folk culture and one other showed Montenegrin folk culture. The largest number of covers dedicated to the subject appeared in 1928, the year of Stjepan Radić’s death. By my calculations the proportion of cover images given over to Yugoslav folk imagery in *Svijet* was 12.8% in 1926, 7.7% in 1927, 17.3% in 1928, 9.6% in 1929, 11.5% in 1930, 7.7% in 1931, 5.8% in 1932, 7.7% in 1933, 3.8% in 1934, 15.4% in 1935, 3.8% in 1936.

²²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

In Chapter 2, I described a concurrent trend in the posters and advertising of the Zagreb Trade Fair (*Zagrebački Zbor*). Images of strong, powerful peasants appeared in 1926 and 1927 advertisements for the fair preceding Vanka and Zdenka Sertić's own poster depicting a massive peasant woman in bold graphic folk dress in 1928. The celebratory mood of that imagery crossed over to *Svijet*, where Antonini illustrated several covers with folkloric motifs advertising the Zagreb Trade Fairs of 1927 and 1928. A delicately embroidered gold pattern on bold stripes of white, blue, and black advertised the 1928 special exhibition of folk handicrafts in which Vanka's *Zagorje Bride* was exhibited. On 8 September 1928, a strong Šestine peasant holding the reigns of a rearing bull seems to provide the pendant to the female figure in Vanka and Sertić's poster. Like this cover, the vast majority of folk imagery that Antonini produced for *Svijet* depicted the Šestine peasants who lived in the immediate vicinity of Zagreb, and were an integrated part of the city. Thus, the image of the Šestine peasant became ambiguously tied to both the distinct civic identity of Zagreb and—because Zagreb was the historic capital of Croatia—to the broader identity of the Croatian nation. On the 8 September 1928 cover, Antonini's placement of the peasant and bull between the coat of arms of the city of Zagreb (castle on blue) and of Croatia (the red and white checkerboard, or *šahovnica*) makes this dual symbolism clear. The strength of both man and bull stand in for the strength of city and nation. This ambiguous symbolic dualism of Šestine peasants may have made them seem more innocuous in the eyes of the Yugoslav authorities.

Antonini even pulled Vanka's work into his efforts to depict images of strong peasants. Perhaps because the two artists were acquainted, Vanka was one of the first artists to be featured

in *Svijet*.²²⁷ In a one-page feature in an early 1926 issue, black-and-white reproductions of *Zagorje Bride*—the same work later featured on the December 1929 *Ženski list* cover—and *So That Our Field May Be Fertile* (c. 1916, discussed in Chapter 1) were featured together.²²⁸ It even included a printed transcription of the folk song that Vanka had included in a scroll-shaped cartouche in the lower center of *Zagorje Bride* not visible on the *Ženski list* cover:

Tiček nam popeva u Javorskom gradu
Nutri nam naplečeju Devojčicu mladu

Belu i črlenu kakti Jabučicu
Tihu i mirovnu kakti Grličicu
Tenku i visoku kano Konoplicu
Medna usta ima kano Jagodica.
Črnega pogleda kakti Trnulica
Drobnega pohoda kakti Golubica
Sreten Junak bude kiju Ljubil bu

Još srećniji bude kiju Vuzel bude

A bird is singing in Javorski town
Where a young maiden is getting her hair
braided

She is pale and red like an apple
Quiet and peaceful like a turtle dove
Thin and tall like hemp
Her mouth is sweet like strawberry
Her eyes are dark like sloe berries
She takes small steps just like a dove
Fortunate will be the one who will love
[kiss] her

Even more the one who will marry her²²⁹

Zagorje Bride reproduced folk dress from around Bistra, located just north of Zagreb in the Zagorje region. The lyrics of this traditional folk song are in the *kajkavski* dialect of Croatian spoken primarily around Zagreb thus specifically linking this work to that area. Variations of this folksong are sung at weddings in almost every community located in Zagorje.

3.3.1 Defining Borders with Croatian Folk Culture

The *Svijet* covers from this period of 1926 to 1930 reveal that Antonini's depictions romanticized and glorified Croatian folk culture. Such representations of folk imagery must be linked to a

²²⁷ There is evidence that Vanka may have produced cartoons for Antonini's earlier satirical magazine *Šišmiš*, which was published 1915 to 1917. See a reproduction a postcard Vanka wrote congratulating Antonini on the magazine's success dated 20 May 1917: Kolveshi, *Otto Antonini: Zagreb i "Svijet" / "Svijet" i Zagreb dvadesetih...*, 16.

²²⁸ "Iz hrvatske umjetnosti," 119.

²²⁹ Many thanks to Nikolina Bobesić, an art history graduate student in Zagreb, for graciously transcribing and translating this song and finding out more information about its origins when I was first starting this project.

desire to express a distinct Croatian identity in the face of political repression within interwar Yugoslavia. Beyond Šestine, a much smaller number of covers from this period from 1926 to 1930 also depicted peasants from other regions of Croatia. The 27 July 1929 cover shows a young, reclining shepherd, playing a flute, whose silhouette against the sunset appears as an integrated part of his indigenous mountainous landscape. Based on his narrow trousers and red cap, as well as the mountainous background, the image appears to draw from the folk culture of the mountainous Lika region of Croatia. Taking cues from ethnographic displays (discussed in Chapter 2), such images of peasants attempt to capture distinct qualities of regional folk dress, and, as did the ethnographic museum, *Svijet* utilized images of peasants from various regions, including Dalmatia, Posavina, and Istria. Although such images were rather few and far between in the publication, they still helped to reinforce a mental map of Croatia for the magazine's readers. The Lika region may have been carefully chosen because it contained a large population of Serbs who, in line with political events, largely remained absent from these covers. Indeed, the cover of *Svijet* magazine became a space in which the nation was imagined and folk dress was an effective signifier because it allowed Croats to pick out the distinct regional folk cultures that made up the nation.

In comparison, an examination of Vanka's work for evidence of similar Croatian border laying comes up short. In contrast to Antonini, Vanka never attempted to trace the larger political borders of the historic Croatian Triune Kingdom through folk culture in his imagery. Vanka had been integrating folk culture into his artistic works long before the rise in such imagery from 1926 to 1930, but in the range of his works from 1913 and 1941, Vanka only ever painted images

of folk culture from the historic region of Central Croatia.²³⁰ Remarkably, Vanka's works showed more variety of folk culture than *Svijet* covers but in a smaller geographic area. In *Zagorje Bride* and *So That Our Field May Be Fertile* he painted folk culture that was in close proximity to Zagreb, but not the typical Šestine peasant to whom Antonini was partial and who held ambiguous ties to both civic and national identities. Vanka only painted the Šestine folk dress in *Proštenjari* (1913) and *Under the Old Cross* (c. 1923), images in which they appear outside the urban context. His other paintings depict the folk dress of communities within a short distance of Zagreb including the region of Zagorje, where Vanka was raised by a peasant family until the age of 8, and the regions of Moslavina and Pokuplje to the south, where Vanka went on an ethnographic expedition in 1923. Though Vanka spent his summers on the Dalmatian island of Korčula, where he would have had ample opportunity to paint the folk dress of that region, he painted only a large number of landscapes there. Vanka was making a conscious decision not to participate in a vision of Croatian national identity based on broader geopolitical borders. Instead, he stuck to the local familiar folk culture that had shaped his upbringing.

3.3.2 Fashionable Folk and Ethnic Identity

A short one-page fashion feature in an early issue (27 February 1926) of *Svijet* depicted three women with shiny *bubikopf* haircuts posed with long necks and arms akimbo in the latest drop-waist dresses of the 1920s.²³¹ The basic tropes of contemporary fashion spreads were already in place with outfits transitioning from day- to evening-wear and accessories carefully

²³⁰ This historic region surrounding Zagreb was one of four such historic regions alongside Dalmatia, Istria, and Slavonia. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Dalmatia and Istria had been part of the Austrian half of the Empire, while Croatia and Slavonia belonged to the Hungarian crown lands.

²³¹ Otto Antonini, "Naše moderne gospodje i narodno vezivo," *Ženski list*, 69.

arrayed. However, a closer look reveals that their modern fashions were embellished not with the latest motifs from France or Germany, but instead with quite traditional ornamentation from Croatian folk culture. Inspired by a recent visit to the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, Antonini admonished Zagreb women for always following distasteful foreign trends. Instead, he used the article to encourage them to adopt folkloric motifs with what he saw as their natural and logical beauty and deeper meanings. Antonini designed the outfits with folkloric ornamentation culled from three distinct regions of Croatia. The first woman models a smart day jacket which is unadorned except for pockets decorated with the floral embroidery found around Sisak, just south of Zagreb. The second turns her back to reveal a draped white crepe shawl with the large floral embroidery of the Posavina region that runs along the Sava river. The final figure wears a striking black evening dress with the gold embroidery of the Syrmia (Srijem) region bordering Serbia. Although Antonini once again reinforced the geopolitical borders of the Croatian nation, he also drew attention to another way of imagining the nation—by integrating folk culture into women’s everyday fashions and everyday lives.²³²

It was this applied art approach to the integration of folk culture which appeared frequently in *Ženski list*. This magazine was heavily influenced by its founder and editor, Marija Jurić “Zagorka” (1873-1957), one of the first female journalists and authors in Croatia.²³³ She instilled in the new journal her own distinctive brand of anti-Hungarian nationalism that emerged from her personal experiences in the late Habsburg monarchy. Born to an upper-middle-class

²³² For more on the relationship of ethnic motifs to the fashion of the 1920s Zagreb see Djurdja Bartlett, “Fashion and Lifestyle,” in *Art Déco and Art in Croatia Between the Two Wars*, ed. Anđelka Galić and Miroslav Gašparović (Zagreb: Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb, 2011).

²³³ Marija Jurić’s penname “Zagorka” means a woman from the Zagorje region north of Zagreb. She, like Vanka, had an identity based primarily in Central Croatia and developed in the last years of the Habsburg Monarchy. Zagorka was invited to publish the magazine by Ignjat Schwartz, the founder and head of the *Medjunarodni Prometni, Novinski i Oglasni Zavod* (The International Traffic, Newspaper and Advertising Agency) which specialized in media advertising and the distribution of German media. Ignjat Schwartz and his wife Jozefina Josipa Schwartz were the main owners of the journal until 1938. Vujnovic, *Forging the Bubikopf Nation*, 118-21.

family in the Zagorje region, Zagorka was compelled into an arranged marriage by her parents with a wealthy Hungarian engineer in 1890, but fled the marriage and Hungary five years later to return to Zagreb and pursue a career as one of the first female journalists.²³⁴ Strongly anti-imperialist, including resisting the influence of both German and Hungarian culture, she brought to her women's journal both a fierce patriotism—that could be defined both as Yugoslav and Croatian at different moments—and strong feminist values.²³⁵

We have worked on building, and we will continue to build this magazine in the complete faith that our female part of the nation wants its own domestic magazine in their language, spirit, and feeling—and, for that reason, they will continue to nurture *Ženski list* and support it with their love and patriotic devotion.²³⁶

The goal of the journal was both to get local women reading Croatian media rather than German, Austrian, and Hungarian media, and to create a forum for Croatian women to discuss their everyday lives, whether those were in the home or out in the work place. As scholar Marina Vujnović has written, this was not a journal where the editors dictated the entire content, but rather readers contributed letters, opinions, and photographs in an active dialogue with the editors. Like Vanka, one of the main beliefs that Zagorka upheld in her journalistic and literary works was the economic and national importance of peasants in Croatian society and the importance of class justice.

Ženski list began to run a special series of handicraft features based on folk-culture-inspired patterns in May 1927 during the magazine's third year. The special one-page features

²³⁴ In many ways Zagorka's personal life mirrored the Croatian struggle against Hungarian attempts to limit the region's political autonomy and freedom of speech. Zagorka left her marriage soon after Stjepan Radić led a student protest and burned a Hungarian flag on Ban Jelačić Square in Zagreb. She received her first position at the newspaper *Obzor* and published her first novel (1899) through the support of Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmeyer. Ibid., 86.

²³⁵ At the end of World War I, she published a fantasy serial "The Red Ocean" in *Jutarnji list* which is widely pointed to as reflecting both Yugoslav and Marxist leanings. The three main characters, a Croat, a Serb, and a Slovene fight "the island of terror." Ibid., 101.

²³⁶ "Our Dear Subscribers," *Ženski list*, January 1929, 1. Translation from ibid., 147.

about “folk embroidery” (“*narodno vezivo*”) was introduced as a regular feature alongside other reader favorites including illustrated fiction pieces. The “folk embroidery” feature appeared almost every month through 1929. The embroidery patterns depicted were meant to embellish women’s and children’s garments, or, just as often, the magazine featured small projects for the home including tablecloths, pillows, and curtains. The patterns could be purchased by readers who sent away for them and were usually designed by Draga Kovačević-Dugački, who worked for the magazine creating handicraft patterns. These “folk embroidery” projects in *Ženski list* were presented as a means to preserve traditional folk culture and included descriptions of where each type of embroidery was practiced and of the aesthetic merits of each style. However, the illustrations often reveal that the results were far from traditional folk culture. The sparse geometry of the bedroom set (March 1928) spoke more to the modernist aesthetics of the Wiener Werkstätte and the elegant summer dresses (April 1929) to the leisure of the elite urban classes.

Evidence shows that these were not unrealized craft ideas conceptualized by over-zealous nationalists. Documentation of Croatian women actually making these and other folk-inspired handicrafts for their wardrobes and homes reveals that the modern Croatian woman readily adopted this hybridity of traditional folk culture and new fashion. For example, *Svijet* featured a photo essay in the 20 October 1928 issue about the winners of a competitive fashion show held at the Zagreb trade fair in that year.²³⁷ At this event, which followed just a month after the exhibition of folk handicraft in which Vanka’s *Zagorje Bride* was displayed, women and their children modeled fashionable outfits with traditional folk embroidery. On the cover of the *Svijet* issue, Antonini depicted an elegant seated woman in profile whose closely draped white dress was embroidered in red folkloric motifs. For *Ženski list* the publication of folkloric patterns

²³⁷ “Zagrebački Zbor 18. do 21. X. 1928,” *Svijet*, 27 October 1928, 388.

culminated in an “Exhibition of the Handicrafts of *Ženski list* Subscribers” held 19-26 May 1929 in the Zagreb Umjetnički paviljon, the most prominent exhibition space in the city of Zagreb at that time.²³⁸ According to *Ženski list* the exhibition was well attended—the magazine reported ten thousand visitors—and it received coverage in all the major Zagreb newspapers. The installation included a room set up as a bedroom and another as a dining room with crocheting and needlework shown in situ. The central hall at the entrance of the pavilion was transformed into a “temple of folk embroidery” (“hram našeg narodnog veza”).²³⁹ A photograph of the installation shows the central platform of this “temple” draped with embroidered tablecloths and handkerchiefs and surmounted by mannequins displaying contemporary modern fashions embellished with traditional folkloric elements. The jury who judged the entries included Antonini and a number of other prominent interwar Zagreb personalities who have already been mentioned in this project: the director of the Ethnographic Museum, Salamon Berger (discussed in Chapter 2); the director of the Women’s professional school (*Ženska stručna škola*), Tina Ausperger; the professor of handicraft who had converted Vanka’s painting into an embroidery, Terezija Paulić; and amateur craft maker, Slava Fürst. As further evidence of this merging of the traditional and the modern, the winner of the top prize created embroideries based on old folk textiles, but received a new sewing machine as her prize.

Svijet and *Ženski list* were clearly reflecting a penchant for folk culture among the middle class. Chapter 2 described how museums of applied arts in the late Habsburg Empire had directed their power and resources into guiding both the middle class and craftsmen towards appreciating folk culture and away from mass-produced designs that were deemed less appropriate to represent the Empire. In the interwar period, museums of applied arts remained

²³⁸ “Izložba ručnih radova pretplatnica ‘Ženskog lista,’” *Ženski list*, June 1929, 7-12.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

but lost their imperial network and their mission to subsume national folk cultures into an image of the Empire. In Zagreb, the task of caring for and exhibiting folk culture was inherited by the Ethnographic Museum. However, magazines like *Svijet* and *Ženski list* took over some of the cultural labor of guiding middle-class taste away from foreign and mass-produced goods and towards local folk culture now with the patriotic purpose of preserving and reviving traditional Croatian culture.²⁴⁰ As the examples from *Svijet* and *Ženski list* reveal, the results of their efforts were not folk culture itself, but hybrid folkloric products which attempted to combine traditional folk motifs with modern fashions and lifestyles. Unlike the Ethnographic Museum, where folk dress was carefully cataloged and preserved to create the illusion of its purity and timelessness, these magazine features fostered a flexible and developing interaction with folk culture, one that valued the manipulation of folk culture and its incorporation into everyday life. The outcome was not supposed to be the “authentic” folk culture preserved at the museum. Instead, such projects put the agency for creating folkloric works in the hands of modern women, allowing them to express their identities in their own lives.

Vanka’s appearances in mass media during this time period certainly were part of this upsurge of nationalistic imagery in the late 1920s. However, I would argue that Vanka was not a Croatian nationalist in any traditional sense, and did not belong to this former trend of defining

²⁴⁰ Although my analysis focuses closely on popular media, part of this labor of promoting the preservation and production of folk textiles and art in Croatia was also undertaken by women's cultural groups. One such prominent group was the *Gospojinska udruga za očuvanje narodnog veziva* (Ladies’ Association for the Preservation of Folk Embroidery, later also called the *Ženska udruga za očuvanje seljačke umjetnosti i obrta*, Women’s Association for the Preservation of Folk Arts and Crafts) which was founded in 1913 and collected older embroideries to use as models for new items. Ženka Frangeš served as secretary, who was also the wife of Vanka’s colleague, prominent interwar sculptor Robert Frangeš-Mihanović. Ženka Frangeš and the Women’s Association were instrumental in the organization of the 1928 Zagreb Trade Fair, which Vanka also helped organize. Ženka Frangeš was prominent advocate of preserving traditional folk textile art in order to promote a specifically Croatian form of expression. More research remains to be done on Ženka Frangeš and the Women’s Association. See “Naše narodno vezivo.” *Ženski list*, July 1925, 19-20. See also Jasna Galjer and Andrea Klobučar, “Narodni izraz i nacionalni identitet u djelovanju Branke Frangeš Hegedušić,” *KAJ - časopis za književnost, umjetnost, kulturu* XLV, no. 6 (2012): 66-68.

the regions imagined to make up the Croatia nation. In all of his works, he only depicted folk culture originating in Central Croatia. Vanka's works do not even depict the sentimental Šestine images which are so familiar around Zagreb and which often stand in for the nation in Antonini's illustrations and the work of other interwar artists. Instead, Vanka contributed to a different envisioning of the nation. His *Spring Blessing* embroidery pattern for *Ženski list* appeared six months after the *Ženski list* exhibition and he produced another embroidery pattern the following December in 1930. Vanka's folkloric embroideries for *Ženski list* present contradictions. They celebrate folk culture, but are not themselves folk culture. They combine the modern means of mass-produced magazines and mass-produced needlework patterns with premodern handicrafts. Certainly by the interwar period needlework was not the most progressive activity in which women could take part, but the medium did have the notable ability to give women ownership of the images they were recreating.²⁴¹ In these contradictions lay needlework's ability to empower women to shape folk culture to their own needs and to use home goods to express a modern, personal, ethnic identity. Vanka created the original image, but women readers, such as Zora Pleše, brought forth the actual domestic product and thus became makers in the process. This surge in folkloric imagery in the second half of the 1920s with its competing visions of the nation would soon give way to a sharp decline.

²⁴¹ For more on the politics of women's embroidery, especially in the Habsburg Empire, see Rebecca Houze, "At the Forefront of a Newly Emerging Profession? Ethnography, Education and the Exhibition of Women's Needlework in Austria-Hungary in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 1 (2008).

3.4 THE DICTATORSHIP AND THE DECLINE OF POPULAR FOLKLORIC IMAGERY, 1930-35

Vanka's *Ženski list* cover of December 1929 appeared at a tense period in Yugoslav politics. Just a year earlier, the inclusion of Vanka's *Zagorje Bride* in the ethnographic exhibition at the Zagreb Trade Fair had been overshadowed by the death of HSS leader Stjepan Radić on 8 August 1928 as a result of the Belgrade Parliament shooting. In the aftermath of the parliamentary shooting, King Aleksandar I Karađorđević had eliminated the parliament, establishing a dictatorship on 6 January 1929. King Aleksandar had always asserted a doctrine of integral Yugoslavism which held that South Slavs constituted one unified nation made up of several "tribes," but now he instituted a number of laws which outlawed any form of "tribalism" that promoted Croat or Serb nationalism.²⁴² In a further attempt to encourage political unity, he changed the name of the country in October 1929 from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Equally significantly, this period marked the worst years of the Great Depression and traditional peasant life was changing quickly with the growing penetration of the outside world into village life.²⁴³

After the establishment of this royal dictatorship in 1929 and a new constitution in 1931, images and articles related to folk culture fell dramatically in number. This was caused in part by the 1929 Law on the Press (*Zakon o štampi*) declared in January. In addition to already far-

²⁴² Christian Axboe Nielsen's recent book explores how King Aleksandar enforced a unified Yugoslavian identity through surveillance and censorship, especially of Croat nationalists. Nielsen argues that it was this forced change of identity that drove Croats and Serbs further apart. Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs: Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

²⁴³ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 184. Jelavich writes, "It is difficult to overestimate the effects of this crisis; it may have had an even greater role in determining the future course of the European states than the national and international controversies that have been described previously."

reaching censorship powers created to punish insults to the monarchy or government, now any publications were prohibited “where religious or tribal discord is provoked.”²⁴⁴ This meant stories that might encourage Serb-Croat contention or otherwise foster nationalism were censored.²⁴⁵ Appearing just a couple months later, Vanka’s *Zagorje Bride* cover seems to contradict this mandate by presenting an illustration of a distinctly Croatian identity. However, hints of this censorship are visible in the accompanying article. Although Baldić painted a romanticized and patriotic image of Zagreb, the surrounding countryside, and Vanka’s apartment in the old upper city, she was careful to describe Vanka’s works in the article with great fervor but without ever using the word “Croatian.” Instead she uses the popular and generic “our” (“our peasant women,” “our people,” “our region,” “that which is ours,” “our folk dress,” “our nation,” etc.). This linguistic evasiveness could refer to the Zagreb region, the Croatian nation, or Yugoslav pan-nationalism. Vanka’s *Zagorje Bride* cover was on the tail end of this roughly five-year period of popular folkloric imagery accompanying the nationalism of the HSS, but was already showing signs of the effects of the dictatorship on nationalist imagery. Baldić carefully balanced the reader’s interest in Croatian folk culture with the regulations of the new regime.

Around 1931, as the number of *Svijet* covers with patriotic images of Croatian folk culture declined rapidly, a different image of folk culture emerged on smaller scale with a notable change in the style and content. The celebratory images of proud peasants with ornate folk dress gave way to social-realist images of peasant labor. The 1 October issue from that year depicted several men in folk dress producing wine. One man enters the scene in the lower right

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs: Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia*, 175.

²⁴⁵ Research remains to be done on if *Svijet* or *Ženski list* were ever censored. Or indeed what imagery was the subject of censorship, since Nielsen only describes the censorship of text. Nielsen’s book provides a model for conducting such research and the files of the Centralni presburo za opštu državnu obaveštajnu službu (Central Press Bureau for General State Intelligence Service) are located in the Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade.

with a basket of grapes on his back, while the other three operate an enormous wine press that looms over them. These men appear to wear folk dress from the Šestine region near Zagreb, but all the distinctive features seen in previous *Svijet* covers have disappeared. The hat is absent, too impractical for this heavy labor, and none of the embroidery or embellishments on their vests are made visible. This image is even drawn by the same artist, Otto Antonini, who drew most of the earlier romanticized images. Those earlier images had provided a proximity that allowed the viewer to see the intricacies of the garments and had emphasized the individuality of the wearer and thus emphasized ethnic borders. Now these depictions placed the viewer at such a distance that any individuality or regional specificity of folk dress was suppressed. The anonymous laborer became the subject of these covers. Other illustrations from the period confirm this shift in representation. The 5 November 1932 cover shows a lone woman walking along a rural path, hunched under the burden of an enormous bundle of sticks. Her dress has lost all of the vibrancy of previous depictions of peasants. She cuts a dark and gloomy silhouette against a landscape on fire with fall colors. The 4 February 1933 cover shows a group of four faceless women washing clothing along a creek in a snowy village. The dull white of their dresses appears dirty against the snow; only their red accessories add color. These *Svijet* covers of the early 1930s reveal both the repression of nationalist imagery under the new dictatorship and the economic and political plight of the peasant during the Great Depression.

A similar trend is observable in *Ženski list*. By 1931, images of folk culture and handicrafts related to folk art decreased in number. The one-page “folk embroidery” (*narodna veziva*) features, which appeared monthly beginning in May 1927, disappeared in December 1929. They were soon replaced with a more generic section on “modern embroidery” (*moderna veziva*) that rarely featured folk embroidery. In the December 1929 issue (on the cover of which

Vanka's painting is featured), a new section with a more historical approach to folk textiles featured full-color close-ups of historic folk embroidery accompanied by identifying information.²⁴⁶ However, these features did not suggest freedom of expression to adopt folkloric motifs to their everyday lives like the earlier features. They only appeared at infrequent intervals until July 1932. Zagorka had tried her best to establish a liberal arena for Yugoslav women to define their modern experiences free from the mandates of German and Hungarian media and fashions. However, in the years leading up to World War II, *Ženski list* would come under new editorship and reflect an increasing political conservatism, eventually becoming a tool of fascist propaganda.

3.5 *ŽENSKI LIST* UNDER THE USTAŠA, 1939-1944

On 9 October 1934, while conducting a state visit in Marseille, France, King Aleksandar was assassinated. It was the first political assassination caught on film, marking a distinctly modern moment. A Macedonian revolutionary had carried out the killing, hired by a group of Croat fascists who called themselves the Ustaša and who operated in exile in Mussolini's Italy. In the wake of the assassination, Prince Regent Paul ruled in place of Aleksandar's son, King Peter II, who was only 11 when his father died. The Prince Regent displayed more openness toward finding a Yugoslav solution to the Croatian question by relocating internal district borders and through loosened restrictions on expressions of nationalism in the wake of King Aleksandar's assassination. However, the economic crisis as well as the dictatorship had spurred a political

²⁴⁶ In contrast, the rest of the magazine was usually printed in black and white, except for a few pages of color illustrations of fashion. The examples are usually nineteenth-century folk textiles and mostly come from areas of Herzegovina and Bosnia, but also from areas of Croatia and Serbia.

and social atmosphere in Zagreb that was more conservative, traditional, and nationalistic. In the second half of the 1930s, several years after Vanka had immigrated to the United States in 1934, a second wave of folk imagery occurred in interwar Zagreb media abetted both by this new openness to a Croatian solution and by the growing conservatism in the years leading to World War II.

Svijet did not survive long in the economic depression. At the end of 1936, the magazine addressed their readers who, suffering from the economic crisis, could not afford the 5 dinars cover price. The magazine tried to compromise by offering shortened 16-page issues in the coming year at a lower subscription rate, but the magazine was discontinued instead, ending its eleven-year run in December 1936.

Ženski list, on the other hand, was able to continue despite the harsh economic crisis. Reflecting this growing conservatism, the ownership of the magazine was transferred from the widow of the original Jewish publisher, Jozefina Josipa Schwartz, and Zagorka was replaced in December 1938 with editor Sida Košutić.²⁴⁷ Košutić was a poet whose conservative works celebrated Croatian patriotism and Catholicism. She had joined the staff of the magazine in 1937. Under Zagorka's influence, *Ženski list* had been motivated by her anti-imperialist patriotism that was open to Yugoslavism and by her feminism through which she encouraged women to become financially independent. Under Košutić's guidance, the images of folk culture reappeared in a new form as she pushed *Ženski list* towards an openly reactionary form of Croatian nationalism that left Yugoslavism behind and was opposed to the Serbian monarchy. Košutić changed the name to *Hrvatska ženski list* (Croatian Women's Magazine) in April 1939 emphasizing this new

²⁴⁷ After Zagorka was removed as editor from her magazine she attempted, briefly, to start another magazine, *Hrvatica* (Croatian Woman). The magazine was registered to Košutić, but it was published by a secret group motivated by the desire to take ownership out of Jewish hands. Vujnovic, *Forging the Bubikopf Nation*, 163-64.

national identity. The magazine reflected increasing political conservatism and eventually became an instrument for Ustaša propaganda after the invasion of Yugoslavia by the Axis forces.

With Košutić's editorial takeover the visual identity of the magazine changed dramatically. For the first time, the magazine stopped producing covers which illustrated the latest women's fashions, and replaced them with a steady stream of images of Croatian folk culture—some of the first covers dealing with folk culture since Vanka's cover in 1929. For the first several months under the new title *Hrvatska ženski list*, this consisted of kitschy, sentimental illustrations of traditional village scenes including farmers, woodcutters, and Christmas carolers. These gave way to a new stark, black-and-white photography of village life and women in folk dress. Although photographs had appeared frequently amongst the magazine's contents, covers of Croatian magazines had customarily been illustrated up until this point in the mid 1930s. These new representations of Croatian folk culture had a different style and mood than the previous celebratory folk imagery from 1926 to 1930 discussed above. Despite its idealized content, this new medium of black-and-white photography lent the imagery a new realism unachievable in the previous illustrations. These photographs took advantage of some of the techniques of New Objectivity, including camera angles that gave the work a documentary feel. The cover of the July 1939 issue, for example, depicted a bust-length portrait of a young woman shot from directly in front and slightly below. Unlike the bold peasants in Antonini's and Vanka's folkloric imagery of the late 1920s, this young woman looks demurely downward. In this medium the smoothness of her face is set off by the texture of the tall stack of coral beads which she wears around her neck, a part of the traditional folk dress of the Posavina region. The cover is tinted the deep red of these beads.

These starkly conservative photographs of Croatian folk culture on the cover *Hrvatska ženski list* began almost two years before the invasion of Yugoslavia by the Third Reich on 6 April 1941. They may be read as a cultural sign of the reactionary nationalism that was taking hold in Zagreb even before the fascist Croatian regime, the Ustaša, were placed in power by the Germans. After the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia in 1941, the magazine took its cues from the Ustaša, and presented a photograph of the country's new leader, Ante Pavelić, on the May-June 1941 issue.

3.6 FOUR SPINNERS

One final visual comparison will reinforce the observations made in this chapter about how Vanka's work relates to the rise of folkloric imagery produced in the period from 1926 to 1930, including how it differs from the reactionary nationalism of the late 1930s. Vanka's *Spring Blessing* needlework pattern offered in the December 1929 *Ženski List* had been such a success—with many readers writing in to say they had sewn Vanka's pattern—that the magazine published another needlework pattern the following winter based on a work by Vanka. For his second and final needlework pattern, he chose an archetypical image of folk culture in the region as his subject: a peasant woman spinning thread—*Spinner (Prelja)*.²⁴⁸ For this 1930 pattern, the related article even claimed Vanka went out of his way to create an image that could be easily reproduced in needlework, specially studying the making of embroidery patterns before undertaking this second design.

²⁴⁸ *Ženski list*, December 1930. While Vanka's *Spring Blessing* clearly existed as a painting based on circulating reproductions and an offer made to the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, it is not clear that *Spinner (Prelja)* took the original form of a painting. I have not come across any other pictures or mentions of the work.

In Central and Eastern Europe, spinners appeared frequently among images of folk culture. They represented the maintaining of the most traditional and fundamental form of folk practice: the production of cloth. In most regions of Yugoslavia the hand-production of cloth had slowly been phased out—even for the construction of folk dress—in favor of cheaper and easily accessible mass-produced cloth. Significantly, in Zagreb images of spinners were often situated in other regions of Yugoslavia perceived to be more “primitive” than the Croatian regions. In Zagreb spinners were most often depicted as living in Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro—areas where Croatians assumed the most traditional folk practices still persisted.²⁴⁹ In addition to being perceived as more primitive, Bosnia and Herzegovina also bore the additional symbolic burden of belonging to the mental map of greater Croatian geographic aspirations.

There are several images of spinners from these interwar Zagreb periodicals with which to compare Vanka’s *Spinner*. Antonini depicted a Bosnian spinner on the cover of the 17 November 1928 issue of *Svijet*. The woman’s seated form creates a stable pyramid which is echoed in the mountain to the right and the traditional house to the left, integrating her into her landscape. As in other folkloric images from 1928, she gazes directly out at the viewer, strong and proud. On the cover of the 7 June 1930 issue, a more sobering image of a Montenegrin mother spinning is shown. She sits quietly next to her child’s cradle, which is covered in traditional wood ornamentation and textiles.

In contrast to Antonini’s works, Vanka stayed consistent in keeping his distance from the geopolitical boundaries of a greater Croatia. Unlike other Croatian artists, he placed his spinner, this symbol of the ultimate traditional folk practice, directly in the heart of Croatia, just as he had

²⁴⁹ This is one expression of a phenomenon identified by Milica Bakić-Hayden as “nesting” Orientalisms in which in the Balkans those neighboring regions to the south and east of any given region are perceived and depicted as more primitive or backwards. Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme “Balkans”: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics,” *Slavic Review* 52, no. 1 (Spring 1992).

restricted his other folkloric paintings to the Central Croatian region around Zagreb. The folk dress of Vanka's spinner appears to be a slight variation of the floral embroidered dress worn by the massive peasant in his and Sertić's 1928 poster for the Zagreb Trade Fair. It was based on the floral embroidery of the Sisak-Moslavina region also depicted in his *So That Our Field May Be Fertile*. Vanka's works were pulled into the 1925 to 1930 wave of folk imagery, but these close examinations reveal his continued refusal to participate in the network of constructed and hostile national identities that divided interwar Yugoslavia. Vanka's *Spinner* is certainly more romanticized and sentimental than his other works, but—notably—if we examine the content of the work, this rural Croatian peasant woman serves as the mediating element in a humorous encounter between a crowing rooster and strutting turkey at her feet, perhaps a sly reference to the dispute between Croats and Serbs.

Antonini's 17 November 1928 Bosnian spinner stands in stark contrast to a *Ženski list* cover from November 1939 presenting a photograph of a young woman wearing the same folk dress from Travnik in Central Bosnia. She undertakes an earlier step in the process of spinning—brushing the wool. This comparison between Antonini's work and the photograph by Julija Grill-Dabac reveals much about the distinctions between the two interwar periods of folkloric imagery: the first from 1926 to 1930 and the second preceding the rise of fascist politics in the Independent State of Croatia. Antonini's image is certainly romanticized, but it reveals a powerful directness as this spinner engages the viewer face on. She not only clearly shows how to spin the wool off her distaff, but also showcases the intricate folk carving on the top of her distaff, which were commonly collected ethnographic objects. She appears firmly integrated into the mountainous landscape. In contrast, the spinner from the *Ženski list* photograph again looks demurely downward at her work, drawing our eyes away from her face. The striking angle of the

photograph, taken by Julija Grill-Dabac, is disorienting and fragments the woman from her context.

Examining *Svijet* and *Ženski list* uncovers how magazines integrated visions of the nation into Croatian popular culture and domestic life in the 1920s and 1930s. On one hand, illustrations of folk culture, such as those by Otto Antonini in *Svijet*, presented authoritative and symbolic representations of the country. *Svijet* defined borders in the national imagination through the representation of romanticized and ethnographically-specific folk cultures. On the other hand, a very different approach to nationalism was visible in articles about handicrafts, fashion, and exhibitions, which encouraged women to integrate folkloric motifs into their everyday lives and homes through the production of folk-inspired needlework and handicraft. This provided women with their own adaptable and patriotic agency.

But as the number of folk images declined in the 1930s, social realist images of struggling peasants dropped all sense of ethnographic specificity. This transitioned from the glorification, individualization, and romanticization of the folk and folk dress to images that show only nondescript peasants in the context of hard labor. Interestingly, it was not so much the earlier romanticized images of proud, distinct Croat peasants that allowed for the later ideological move to fascism, as one might think upon first glance. Rather these later images of the laboring, faceless peasant created the mood of despair that opened the door to fascism in Croatia, and new photography with its persuasive, yet nonetheless manipulatable sense of realism.

This chapter has focused on interwar mass media in an attempt to understand Vanka's contribution to the popular image of the Croatian peasant. Vanka's appearances in this interwar mass media reveal that he avoided defining the geopolitical borders of the Croatian nation in

favor of a vision of the nation that could be adapted to people's—especially women's—changing, everyday lives. The next chapter will move into the realm of the traditional fine arts—painting and sculpture—to explore Vanka's position amongst the Croatian region's most prominent interwar artists, many of whom integrated folk culture in various ways into their artworks throughout the interwar period. Looking at their work reveals further how Vanka navigated a spectrum of changing interwar Central European identities that attempted to find solutions to the ongoing Croatian question. Ultimately what influenced his work most deeply was a desire to improve the political rights and social positions of peasant.

4.0 FROM THE VILLAGE TO THE CANVAS: FOLK CULTURE AND COMPETING IDENTITIES IN CROATIAN MODERN ART

In a 1934 review, critic Ivo Hergešić wrote of Vanka, “His former work is so multifaceted and diverse, that it is almost impossible to talk about Vanka as one artistic personality.”²⁵⁰ Indeed, Vanka was chameleonic—producing artwork in several styles over the course of his interwar career that constituted major tendencies in modern Croatian art. As this chapter will explore, his stylistic flexibility meant Vanka was invited to take part in exhibitions and cooperative projects with a broad range of artists who represented both conservative and progressive strains of modern art. And yet, Vanka’s variable approach to both art and identity should not be interpreted as contradictory or mercurial in nature but as representative of the constantly morphing and developing sense of identity that many in early twentieth-century Yugoslav regions experienced as the political ground under them shifted. In this chapter, Vanka’s work will once again serve as an ideal vehicle through which to observe the stylistic and political spectrum of folkloric imagery in early twentieth-century Croatian art.

How to express national identity in painting and sculpture was one of the major questions that occupied modern Croatian artists in the first half of the twentieth century. As established in

²⁵⁰ “Njegov dosadašnji rad tolike je mnogostran i raznolik, da je gotovo nemoguće govoriti o Vanki kao o jednoj umjetničkoj ličnosti.” Ivo Hergešić, “Maksimilijan Vanka – prigodom izložbe u Umjetničkom paviljonu,” *Hrvatska revija* 7, no. 4 (1934): 214. Quoted in part in Grgo Gamulin, “Maksimilijan Vanka,” in *Hrvatsko slikarstvo XX. stoljeća* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1997).

Chapter 1, when examining their artworks, care must be taken not to read twenty-first-century Croatian national identity back onto these works. We must instead actively ask whose nation was being imagined, and how their nationalisms were expressed.²⁵¹ In the complex geopolitical context of the modern Yugoslav (Southern Slav) region, the national identities being represented in these works of art were fluid, competing, and represented a broad political spectrum. Modern Croatian artists explored a variety of means by which to express nationalism for which they produced diverse solutions in iconography, historic styles, color, and landscape, among other things. This study focuses on one way in which Croatian modern artists expressed national identities: through images of Croatian folk culture.²⁵² However, this will not be to the exclusion of those other means—style, composition, color—which will also be considered. Modern Croatian artists used folkloric motifs to express a variety of competing Central European identities, and this chapter will look at artists who represented the breadth of the political spectrum from left to right.

The previous chapters have remained largely in orbit around the fine arts world, examining depictions and displays of Croatian folk culture in museums and mass media. The politics of people, events, institutions, and visual culture observed in those previous chapters will

²⁵¹ In this regard, historian Jeremy King is especially good at warning of the dangers of considering history from the viewpoint of our present day ethnic nations. Jeremy King, "The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond," in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, ed. Maria Bucur-Deckard and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001).

²⁵² As Jasna Galjer and Andrea Klobučar have written, "One of the foundational guidelines of the strategy for the creation of national expression in the visual arts was a focus on the rural complex, which arose from the contemporary aspiration for the formation of national identity on the basis of equating of the peasant with Croatian national identity." Jasna Galjer and Andrea Klobučar are speaking specifically about expressing Croatian national identity, but I think their statement applies just as well to the expression of other competing Central European identities: "Jedna od temeljnih odrednica strategije stvaranja nacionalnog izraza u likovnoj umjetnosti bila je usmjerenost na ruralni kompleks koja je proizašla iz onodobnih težnji oblikovanja nacionalnog identiteta na osnovi izjednačavanja seljačkog s hrvatskim nacionalnim identitetom." Jasna Galjer and Andrea Klobučar, "Narodni izraz i nacionalni identitet u djelovanju Branke Frangeš Hegedušić," *KAJ - časopis za književnost, umjetnost, kulturu* XLV, no. 6 (2012): 73.

serve as a foundation for this chapter's discussion of the art scene. Chapter 2 traced the transition from the cosmopolitan values and imperial aims of prewar applied art museums to the nationalist projects of interwar ethnographic museums. This chapter will observe a mirroring transition in the politics of fine arts exhibitions and artist organizations in early-twentieth-century Croatia. The major actors of the Croatian art scene in the first two decades of the twentieth century—who grew up in the cosmopolitan Habsburg Empire—used their artworks to support Yugoslavism up until the end of World War I. However, the tumultuous politics in the interwar Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (*Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, hereafter KSHS) launched most modern Croatian artists on a new path to define a distinctly Croatian modern art beginning in the late 1920s. I want to emphasize this important transition, but I do so at the risk of oversimplifying a complex context, in which Yugoslavism and Croatian nationalism each existed in a variety of forms and with a variety of motivations that varied based on ethnic and class background. This chapter will examine some of the nuances of this transition from a pan-South Slavism to a narrower Croatian nationalism and it will consider these competing identities through an examination of representations of Croatian folk culture in modern Croatian art.

Vanka's work is once again a valuable connecting thread. Comparing the content and characteristics of Vanka's folkloric works to those of several major Croatian modern artists—alongside whom he worked and exhibited—makes visible a range of political identities all of which appropriated folkloric imagery. In this chapter, almost all of the artists discussed participated in exhibitions and projects that were “Yugoslav” at one point in their career and “Croatian nationalist” at another point, and that were Marxist at one point and fascist at another.

Three major modern Croatian artists will be discussed in this chapter in terms of both the political leanings of their folkloric works and how their work overlapped with Vanka's: Ivan

Meštrović, Ljubo Babić, and Krsto Hegedušić. Of a slightly older generation than Vanka, sculptor Ivan Meštrović (1883-1962) gained recognition for his early works in the style of Rodin at the Vienna Secession. However, it was his prewar series of monumental and heroic sculptures known collectively as the *Kosovo Cycle* (c. 1908-1911) that launched him into international stardom. The series helped broadcast Meštrović's position as a supporter of Southern Slav unity during the Great War, and it was during this time that Vanka's work was exhibited alongside his. Vanka's contemporary Ljubo Babić (1890-1974) played an extremely influential role in the interwar domestic art scene as a painter, theorist, and one of the first curators of modern Croatian art. After the political uproar that followed the shooting of Croatian politicians in the Belgrade parliament in 1928, Babić focused his energy on developing a distinctly Croatian form of modern art, which he called "naš izraz" ("our expression"), and to that end he founded an artist group with Jerolim Miše, Vladimir Becić, and Vanka. Vanka only participated in their first exhibition, but their influence on his work was significant. Finally, of a slightly younger generation than Vanka, Krsto Hegedušić (1901-1975) was a founding member of the influential interwar *Zemlja* (Earth), an association of artists and architects who aimed to reveal the social needs of the rural working poor. In 1932, Vanka painted a set of murals with Hegedušić and several members of *Zemlja* in a popular Zagreb bar, the *Gradski Produm* (City Tavern).

This is not by any means an exhaustive study of the use of folkloric motifs in Croatian modern art—that is not within the purview of this project.²⁵³ However, Ivan Meštrović, Ljubo Babić, and Krsto Hegedušić are widely considered among the most accomplished early-

²⁵³ Omitted here are a number of Vanka's contemporaries who painted picturesque, romanticized depictions of folk culture that appeared often in popular media, namely Joso Bužan and Slavko Tomerlin whose work also appeared frequently in *Svijet* and *Ženski List*. Though a comparison of their work with Vanka's could prove fruitful, their work will not be discussed in this chapter as it represented a popular rather than academic approach to art making.

twentieth-century Croatian artists and each depicts folk culture in their work in a different way and uses it to express a different vision of the Croatian nation. This chapter will explore how Vanka's work aligned with and differed from theirs, and the impact of their influence on the work he produced.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the ruling regime of Socialist Yugoslavia suppressed dissenting nationalisms and censored them from art and art history. The project of studying the nationalist leanings of modern Croatian artists was largely deferred until the fall of the socialist government in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Among Croatian art historians the role of nationalism in prewar and interwar modern art has only been addressed in the scholarship since the establishment of the Republic of Croatia in 1991, and they have focused primarily on expressions of Croatian nationalism rather than Yugoslavism. Among the few scholars dealing with this topic, Petar Prelog has addressed it most directly, arguing that national identity had more influence on the manifestations of modern art in Central Europe than in its Western European counterparts and a number of the key actors in the Croatian scene that are addressed in his work are also discussed in this project.²⁵⁴ As Prelog also points out, creating national culture was a requisite for participating in international culture, and thus did not lead to isolation. One of the more difficult issues for Croatian art historians working on modern Croatian art is to remain critical towards Croatian modernists whose nationalist works supported fascism in the late 1930s and during World War II.

²⁵⁴ Petar Prelog, "Strategija oblikovanja "našeg izraza": Umjetnost i nacionalni identitet u djelu Ljube Babića," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 31 (2007): 268. Other important articles in which he addresses nationalism in Croatian modern art include Petar Prelog, "Hrvatska umjetnost i nacionalni identitet od kraja 19. stoljeća do Drugoga svjetskoga rata," *Kroatologija* 1, no. 1 (October 2010); Petar Prelog, "Pitanje nacionalnog identiteta u Podravskim motivima Krste Hegedušića," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 36 (2012).

Since the 1990s, the English language scholarship about the modern art of Central and Eastern Europe has also gone to great lengths to discuss national identity in intricate detail in conjunction with the emergence of modern art in this region.²⁵⁵ If Steven Mansbach's groundbreaking *Modern Art in Eastern Europe* is any indication, he spends over half of the section on Croatian art parsing out the politics of Croatia's emerging anti-Hungarian national identity, before briefly addressing a few modern artists and only dealing with Meštrović in any depth.²⁵⁶ My project reaffirms Mansbach's basic premise that the modern art of this region cannot be understood without a firm grasp of politics. However, Mansbach's account relies too heavily on the borders of current nation states, and in its necessary brevity cannot address an important set of layered and competing identities, especially in the former Yugoslavia. In this exploration of interwar Croatian arts, I attempt to follow the model put forth in Elizabeth Clegg's *Art, Design, and Architecture in Central Europe, 1890-1920*. She compares all the art centers of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire without losing view of the agency local arts figures, institutions, and magazines wielded.²⁵⁷

What arises most significantly from all of these studies is the idea that nationalism—in its various competing forms and in this region which had suffered centuries of political subjugations—was just as important as any other motivation for producing modern art. As the following sections will explore, folkloric motifs appeared frequently in the works of the most influential Croatian artists working during the interwar period.

²⁵⁵ For further discussion about the historiography of modern Central and Eastern European art refer to the discussion of alternative modernisms in Chapter 1.

²⁵⁶ Steven A. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890-1939* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁵⁷ Elizabeth Clegg, *Art, Design, and Architecture in Central Europe, 1890-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

4.1 IVAN MEŠTROVIĆ AND THE *EXPOSITION DES ARTISTES YOUGOSLAVES*

During the final years of World War I, Vanka created another work in his early series of monumental images of folk culture. Similar to his 1913 *Proštenjari* discussed in Chapter 2, with which Vanka had hoped to introduce the salon audiences of Brussels to the folk culture of his homeland, this was a work intended for international audiences. *Our Mothers 1914-1918* (*Naše Majke 1914.-1918.*) was also similar in its large scale and static composition to *The Supplicants* and the *Lijepa Jela* triptych of a few years prior, but opened on a more somber scene than his previous ethnographic celebrations of folk culture.²⁵⁸ In the foreground nine peasant women gather around the open coffin of a young soldier who appears to have a bandaged head and an amputated arm. In the background is a rural landscape in which more women gather in groups; one group of women carries another coffin up to one of Vanka's signature hilltop churches. In this painting we see Vanka's vision of a postwar Croatian village, covered in graves and populated only by women left to mourn their fallen sons. As in Vanka's other early folkloric works, *Our Mothers* displays the women's identical folk dress in such detail that it can be pinpointed to a specific location in Central Croatia. The white dresses with their intricate pleating at the breast and around the skirt, the black stripes around the cuffs, waist, and collar, and the shaping of the married women's headdresses into horns (*rogovi*) all point to the Pokuplje region (the Kupa River valley) and seem likely to be based on the folk dress from in or near the

²⁵⁸ *Naše Majke 1914-1918* (*Our Mothers*) remained in the artist's possession during his emigration to the United States in 1934, and now resides at the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. At some point in the 1950s, for reasons that are not clear, Vanka reversed and remounted the canvas on a stretcher with smaller dimensions. On the verso he painted a surrealist landscape populated by figures suffering from leprosy. *Naše Majke* is still visible on the verso but at reduced dimensions. The original composition is reproduced in black and white in Antun Jiroušek, "Naše slike," *Vijenac* 18, no. 6 (6 February 1923): 109.

villages of Dvoranci or Jamnica.²⁵⁹ However, despite the emphasis on the local in this depiction of a rural Central Croatian village, the painting was meant to communicate an international political message to those attending the Paris Peace Conference. Representatives of all the major Allied nations had convened in Paris starting in January 1919 to debate the terms of the postwar peace that would eventually result in the Treaty of Versailles.

Our Mothers was first exhibited at the *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves* from 12 April to 15 May 1919 at the Petit Palais, which took place under the patronage of the city of Paris.²⁶⁰ The exhibition was staged at a pivotal moment when the survival of the newly founded Yugoslav state was still up in the air. The *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves* was the largest of several exhibitions promoting Yugoslav (often called “Serbo-Croat”) art that took place in Great Britain, Switzerland, and France in the period towards the end of the war before the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.²⁶¹ It aimed to deliver a powerful message to those attending the Paris Peace Conference. The KSHS had formed shortly after the November armistice when Serbia’s Prince Regent Aleksandar (later King Aleksandar from 1921 to 1934) had accepted the proposal for unification put forth by the National Council of the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs on 1 December 1918. However, the new state had only received official recognition from a few countries including Greece (26 January 1919), Norway (29 January 1919), and the United States (7 February 1919). Despite the encouragement of the United States and Serbia’s argument that

²⁵⁹ The villages are located about 13 miles southwest of Zagreb. Thank you to Vesna Zorić at the Etnografski Muzej Zagreb who provided assistance with the identification of this folk dress. Any mistakes are my own.

²⁶⁰ *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves: au Palais des Beaux-Arts (Petit-Palais)*, (Paris: Petit Palais, 1919). With an introduction by André Michel. This catalog is available online through the Digital Collection of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti).

²⁶¹ Clegg provides an excellent introduction to these understudied Southern Slav exhibitions in her book. Yugoslav advocates, more than any other Slavic state to emerge from the war, used art exhibitions to help achieve their political aims. “Of the three predominantly Slavic successor states to emerge from the collapse of the Austria-Hungary at the end of the Great War—reconstituted Poland and the new, composite entities of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia—the last made substantial investment in promoting its cause internationally through the medium of the art exhibition.” Clegg, *Art, Design, and Architecture in Central Europe*, 254-57.

they had fought for the freedom of South Slavs to determine their own state, the new country remained without recognition from the European Entente Powers (Britain and France), and therefore without fixed borders.²⁶² In no small part this lack of recognition for the new Yugoslav state stemmed from the secret 1915 Treaty of London used to bring Italy into the war on the Entente side by promising them large parts of Croatia's Adriatic coast. To appease Italy, it was Serbia, rather than the new KSHS, that was invited to the Paris Peace Conference. Serbia had been in the war from its start to its finish, had contributed to the Allied victory, and therefore received official representation at the proceedings.²⁶³ However, in the place of a purely Serbian delegation, the KSHS sent a shared delegation of representatives from Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia hoping to influence the discussion at the negotiating table, which confounded the organizers as members of both the losing and winning sides made up the delegation. The KSHS delegation augmented their political representation with a more cultural form of persuasion - the *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves*—meant to persuade politicians that Southern Slavs shared a unified culture. In the final paragraph of the catalog's introductory essay, the political purpose was laid out clearly:

The interpreters of this people, its artists, its writers, its professors, have just told us today: 'In order to develop ourselves, it is essential that we are united not only in spirit and suffering, but also in an organized state.' May their voices be heard by those who can turn their aspirations into reality.²⁶⁴

These artists hoped the victorious Entente powers would approve new state borders that would unite the members of these ethnic groups.

²⁶² Andrej Mitrović, "The Yugoslav Question, The First World War and The Peace Conference, 1914-20," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, ed. Djokić, 54-55.

²⁶³ Serbia was granted three representatives at the plenary session at Versailles, which was less than the five representatives accorded Britain, France, and the US, but more than that of any other country besides Belgium, which was also granted three representatives. *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁶⁴ The introductory essay was written by André Michel. My thanks to Cristina Albu for assistance with this translation. *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves: au Palais des Beaux-Arts (Petit-Palais)*.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Yugoslavism—the desire for a unified Southern Slav nation composed primarily of Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes—was not a new idea brought about by World War I.²⁶⁵ In Croatia, it had emerged in the early nineteenth century as part of the Illyrian Movement. For much of the nineteenth century and up until the end of World War I, Yugoslavism dominated the artwork of politically-oriented Croatian artists. Before the creation of the interwar state, Yugoslavism represented the dominate viewpoint of many intellectuals and members of the small Croatian middle class who hoped it would reunite the historic lands of Croatia under one authority (instead of splitting it between Austria and Hungary). They saw it as a means to provide the region with more political autonomy. Despite this intellectual support for Southern Slavism, few supposed that the Austro-Hungarian Empire would fall during the war. Throughout the war many Serbs and Croats in Croatia still sought a Yugoslav solution that might function within the Habsburg Empire, even as the Serbian Monarchy actively lobbied abroad throughout the war for the creation of a Yugoslav state. At this moment at the end of World War I, the motivations for supporting Yugoslavism and the visions of how Yugoslavism would actually take shape varied widely. While some wanted unification on equal footing, others saw it as a means for achieving a Greater Serbia or a Greater Croatia—and these differences would continue to cause tension in the interwar period as the debates about centralism versus federalism discussed in Chapter 3 revealed. Vanka emerged onto the Croatian art scene in the 1910s, shortly before World War I. He arrived on the tail end of almost a century of Croatian Yugoslavism, but Vanka's artistic activities during and shortly after World War I—especially the exhibition history

²⁶⁵ I did not include Bosniaks in this list because in the mental map of early twentieth-century Southern Slavs, Bosniaks (primarily Muslims) were often not perceived as a separate people. They were perceived as Muslim Croats or Serbs, whichever constituted the identity of the observer.

of *Our Mothers*—show that Vanka, like many of his contemporaries, clearly supported Yugoslav unification during his early career.

Vanka's own relationship to Yugoslav nationalism predated his participation in the *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves*. Before Vanka exhibited *Our Mothers* in Paris, he joined Lada in 1912, which touted itself as a Yugoslav artist organization.²⁶⁶ Following the *First Yugoslav Art Exhibition* held in Belgrade in 1904, Croatian, Slovenian, Serbian, and Bulgarian artists reconvened in Sofia, Bulgaria later that year and founded Lada. This group aimed to shape and promote the idea of a shared Yugoslav culture by organizing joint exhibitions of Southern Slav artists both in Southern Slav countries and in other European cities.²⁶⁷ Following the 1904 *First Yugoslav Art Exhibition*, more international Yugoslav exhibitions organized by Lada chapters from the various Yugoslav capitals alongside other artist organizations followed in Sofia (1906), Zagreb (1908), and Belgrade (1912 and 1922). However, Vanka only took part in the 1922 exhibition. As Elizabeth Clegg has written, these joint Yugoslav exhibitions and the resulting artists association, Lada, was “an undisguised exercise in cultural politics,” that attempted to present a cultural unity for the sake of encouraging a political unity. However, even as Lada and the Yugoslav exhibitions claimed to present a unified Southern Slav culture, their exhibition spaces were always carefully divided by artist organization and city into distinct

²⁶⁶ Vanka exhibited in a November 1912 Lada exhibition to benefit the Red Cross that was held in Zagreb. The exhibit was probably related to the outbreak of the first Balkan War in October 1912. Gamulin, “Maksimilijan Vanka,” 183.

²⁶⁷ A brief introduction to the history of Lada is included in the catalog for the “Treća jugoslavenska umjetnička izložba saveza ‘Lade’ Zagreb 1908,” (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, Hrvatska pučka seljačka tiskara, 1908). This catalog and other “Yugoslav Art Exhibitions” catalogs are available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti. Also see Radina Vučetić’s article which addresses the Yugoslav exhibitions that took place within the borders of Yugoslavia before, during, and after World War I. Radina Vučetić, “Jugoslavenstvo u umjetnosti i kulturi – od zavodljivog mita do okrutne realnosti (Jugoslavenske izložbe 1904.-1940.),” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 41, no. 3 (2009).

groups of artworks produced by Serbs, Slovenes, Bulgarians, and Croats, thus creating an image of a Yugoslavia of similar but distinct ethnic nations.²⁶⁸

Confirming these ethnic national boundaries, Lada was divided into chapters representing the Yugoslav capitals, and Croats had a particularly active chapter in Zagreb that held many independent exhibitions. Vanka was one of the youngest members of the Croatian chapter of Lada, which consisted primarily of the major artists of the previous generation—the founders of the Academy of Art in Zagreb.²⁶⁹ A number of prominent turn-of-the-century artists were actively involved: the painters Oton Iveković and Robert Auer, the sculptor Robert Frangeš-Mihanović, and the graphic artist Menci Clement Crnčić. Vanka was involved in the Zagreb chapter of Lada likely because of the active membership of his early instructor Čikoš Sesija. It is notable that Vanka chose to exhibit with Lada's predominantly older artists rather than participate in the more progressive Hrvatski Proljetni Salon (Croatian Spring Salon) that started exhibiting in 1916 and was organized by Vanka's up-and-coming contemporaries Ljubo Babić and Tomislav Krizman.²⁷⁰ Vanka stuck with Lada because stylistically the academic naturalism that he used for his large scale folkloric works conformed better to works displayed by this older generation of Lada artists like Čikoš Sesija. In contrast, the Hrvatski Proljetni Salon was experimenting with the first expressionist artworks in Croatia, a style Vanka would pick up only later after working alongside Babić in the late 1920s. Additionally, there was also a political divide between these two exhibiting societies. The Hrvatski Proljetni Salon, as the "Croatian" in the title suggests, advocated a Croatian nationalist stance somewhat at odds with the

²⁶⁸ Clegg, *Art, Design, and Architecture in Central Europe*, 142.

²⁶⁹ Menci Clement Crnčić and Bela Čikoš Sesija's private painting school, founded in 1903, became a state-assisted college of arts (Viša škola za umjetnost i umjetni obrt) in 1907 and later became the Zagreb Academy of Arts (Akademija likovnih umjetnosti) in 1921. See *ibid.*, 135.

²⁷⁰ For more on the Hrvatski Proljetni Salon see Radovan Vuković and Petar Prelog, *Proljetni salon: 1916.-1928.* (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, 2007).

Yugoslavism of both Lada and the Medulić Society, which became well known by the public for its Yugoslav stance as will be discussed below.

Vanka participated in the exhibitions that the Croatian chapter of Lada held. He also exhibited *The Supplicants* in a 1918 exhibition in Rijeka that brought Lada and the Hrvatski Proljetni Salon together.²⁷¹ After its debut in Paris, he exhibited *Our Mothers* in three more Lada exhibitions, even after the creation of a Yugoslav state was a foregone conclusion. First, he displayed the work with the Croatian chapter of Lada in 1920 in Zagreb, for which Vanka designed the poster and exhibited 25 works (far more than any other participant, making it almost a solo exhibition).²⁷² In this Zagreb exhibition, *Our Mothers* appeared alongside his *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths, The Second Wreath She Gave to the Host (Lijepa Jela tri vijenca splela, drugi vijenac domaćinu dala, 1916)*. Second, he exhibited *Our Mothers* again in 1921 with the Croatian chapter of Lada this time in an exhibition in Osijek to which he contributed a smaller number of works.²⁷³ Finally, of the multi-national Yugoslav Art Exhibitions, Vanka only participated in the fifth one, held in Belgrade in 1922, again exhibiting *Our Mothers*, this time alongside his 1915 *Marija Bistrica*.

The 1919 *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves* for the Paris Peace Conference was organized quite differently than these previous international Yugoslav Art Exhibitions in which Lada had participated. The *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves* included 66 Yugoslav artists who contributed 285 works. That was a relatively small number in comparison with the over 800 works exhibited at the 1912 *Fourth Yugoslav Art Exhibition* held in Belgrade, which was the last

²⁷¹ *Umjetnička izložba Rijeka 1918.: Sudjeluju Lada i Proljetni salon* (Rijeka: Trgovačka tiskara D.D. Rijeka, 1918). This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti.

²⁷² *Lada 1920.: Izložba "Lade"* (Zagreb: Tisak nadbiskupske tiskare Zagreb, 1920). This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti.

²⁷³ *Katalog izložbe umjetničkog društva "Lade": Osijek 1921* (Zagreb: Hrvatski štamparski zavod d.d. Zagreb, 1921). This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti.

such exhibition held before the start of the Balkan Wars. As with many of these early twentieth-century Yugoslav endeavors, Croats played the most active role. Of the 66 artists featured in the exhibition, 34 came from Croatian regions, mostly Zagreb and Dalmatia. The remaining artists were fairly evenly split between those from Serbia and Slovenia. Although I could not locate photographs of the installation of the exhibition, the catalog indicates that the division of space by national art organizations (Zagreb Lada, Belgrade Lada, etc) used at the Yugoslav Art Exhibitions was abandoned. Instead, artists of different nationalities appear next to each other in numerical order without any divisions, and their cities of residence are only mentioned at the end of the catalog in the index. The organizing committee was also Croatian-dominated and included major modern artists: Vlaho Bukovac, Čikoš Sesija, Tomislav Krizman, and, most prominently, sculptor Ivan Meštrović (1883-1962).²⁷⁴ Meštrović was among the most famous and internationally successful modern Croatian artists, and this exhibition, like most of the other promotional Yugoslav exhibitions that took place around Europe from 1917 to 1919 was organized primarily around his work. Forty of Meštrović's works made up the main body of the *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves*.

Meštrović grew up in Dalmatia and trained as a stone mason in Split before being sponsored to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna beginning in 1900. He exhibited with the members of the Viennese Secession beginning in 1903, and the style of his early work reflected the influence of both the Viennese Secession and Auguste Rodin's sculptures. Meštrović's came into his own mature style in his most well-known series, the *Kosovo Cycle*, which he began around 1908 when he moved to Paris and continued to work on through 1911. The *Kosovo Cycle* was inspired by the Serbian national myth of the Battle of Kosovo—the

²⁷⁴ Because the catalog identifies these artists as the organizing committee, rather than the jury, this exhibition was presumably put together through invitation and not an open call to all artists.

medieval defeat of Serbia at the hands of the Ottoman Empire. It seems contradictory, but this date of Serbian defeat—which took place on St. Vitus’s Day (28 June) 1389—took on incredible national significance for Serbians and later proponents of Yugoslavism. It was commemorated in the Balkan folk ballads that served as the basis of Meštrović’s *Kosovo Cycle* as the start of a prolonged desire for Serbian independence.

Because he was a Croatian artist and thus a subject of the Habsburg Empire, Meštrović’s adoption of Serbian national myth as the subject matter of his artwork was certainly an expression of Yugoslav unity and an affront to the Empire. The artist and his exhibitors often had to carefully play this down. He first exhibited the works in Zagreb with Society Medulić, an association of Croatian artists whose primary ideological aim was Yugoslavism. Meštrović, predicting resistance from Croatian nationalists to his *Kosovo Cycle*, gave Medulić’s 1910 exhibition the title *Despite These Unheroic Times (Nejunačkom vremenu uprkos)*.²⁷⁵ It was held at the Umjetnički paviljon and constituted one of the most important prewar exhibitions of modern Croatian art. Meštrović was only able to openly reveal his support for the creation of a new unified Yugoslav state when he exhibited his work in the Serbian Pavilion (rather than in the Austrian or Hungarian pavilions) at the Rome International Exhibition of Art in 1911. He then went on to spend World War I in exile as a member of the Yugoslav Committee lobbying primarily in London and Paris—alongside Croatian politicians Ante Trumbrić and Franjo Supilo—for the creation of a unified Yugoslav state.

Meštrović was among the most prominent supporters of a type of “integral Yugoslavism” that saw Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes as one unified South Slav people that should be brought together in one centralized state, rather than seeking some type of federal unification of separate

²⁷⁵ *Nejunačkom vremenu uprkos: Izložba Medulića* (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, 1910). This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti.

nations.²⁷⁶ As R.W. Seton-Watson wrote in the catalog of Meštrović's 1915 show at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London:

In a word the works of Ivan Meštrović form an apotheosis of the Yugoslav idea, and are accepted by his compatriots as symbolic of their national dream. Their native force and virility reveal to us the secret of the Serbian revival, and help us to understand the unconquerable spirit which has thrice repelled Austria's 'punitive expeditions,' and so nobly vindicated Serbia's place in the ranks of the Allies.²⁷⁷

In the *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves* in Paris, Meštrović displayed the *Kosovo Cycle*, or as he labeled it in this exhibition *Fragments of the Temple of Kosovo*, and a more recent series of religious works using Byzantine models. Both of these already enjoyed wide acclaim abroad and drew international attention to the exhibition. The *Cycle* was composed of sculptural fragments of heroic human forms representing the Kosovo warriors and their widows - in the forms of busts, truncated sculptures, reliefs, and architectural ornamentation - that were intended to be understood as a whole. Meštrović even created a wooden model of a structure that would incorporate of the elements into one monumental temple that would rival Franz Metzner's *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* completed in 1913.²⁷⁸ The plaster sculpture *Miloš Obilić* (1908) was one of the principle and oft reproduced works. In the Serbian Vidovdan mythology, *Miloš Obilić* was the Serbian warrior who killed Sultan Murad by entering the Turkish camp the evening before the Battle of Kosovo. Like many of the works in this series *Miloš Obilić* is shown with a monumental and muscular body. Although his form is truncated below the knees and his arms

²⁷⁶ Rusinow has written that integral Yugoslavism "...either denied the separate nationhoods of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs alike, or sought to supersede these by positing the existence or potential (now called 'nation-building') of a single Yugoslav nation subdivided into historically formed 'tribe' or merely 'names.'" Rusinow, "The Yugoslav Idea Before Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavia: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, ed. Djokić, 26.

²⁷⁷ *Exhibition of the Works of Ivan Meštrović* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1915). This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti.

²⁷⁸ Elizabeth Clegg has written about how Meštrović's inspiration for the *Kosovo Cycle* came in part from the monumental sculptural embodiment of nationalism in Franz Metzner's *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* completed in 1913 and located outside Leipzig. Elizabeth Clegg, "Meštrović, England, and the Great War," *The Burlington Magazine* 144, no. 1197 (Dec. 2002).

stop shortly below the shoulder, the composition is defined by his powerful stride forward. His bowed head underlines a singularity of purpose.

A comparison of Meštrović's *Kosovo Cycle* and Vanka's *Our Mothers* in the *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves* reveals that both used folkloric imagery - broadly conceived - to support the case for Southern Slav cultural and thus political unity. However, their folkloric imagery manifests itself in distinctly differing forms that represent contrasting views of Yugoslavism and Yugoslav suffering. This may have been the first time that Vanka and Meštrović appeared in a group exhibition together as they were at varying stages in their career. Meštrović was already receiving solo exhibitions abroad including the exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum mentioned above. Vanka, on the other hand, was just beginning his career. In the interwar years they would become well acquainted with one another while working together at Zagreb Academy of Art, although they moved in different circles. After both immigrated to the United States they would resume sporadic correspondence after World War II.²⁷⁹

Comparing Meštrović's *Kosovo Cycle* and Vanka's *Our Mothers* reveals a stark contrast in style and geographical content but a shared theme of suffering. The academic naturalism with which Vanka painted his folkloric imagery differed greatly from Meštrović's stylized, archaic and massive forms which appealed seemingly effortlessly to Western European modernists. Beyond stylistic differences, the two artists also sought out the folk culture of two very different geographic regions in order to represent their Yugoslav nationalism. Meštrović reached across ethnic national borders by portraying a Serbian myth as a Croat artist. This artistic choice reinforces his support for an integral Yugoslavism, uniting southern Slavs as one people with a

²⁷⁹ Some of that postwar correspondence is available in the Ivan Mestrovic Papers (MST), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, IN 46556.

shared mythology. In contrast, Vanka remained true to his artistic loyalty to Central Croatia described in Chapter 3. The folk dress in his scene can be traced to one of a few villages populated by Croats in the Pokuplje region which has a larger Serb demographic.²⁸⁰ For that reason, today's viewer might interpret *Our Mothers* as a Croatian nationalist reaction to World War I, and yet Vanka's exhibition of it both in Paris and in three Lada exhibitions show that he clearly understood it as expressing support for Yugoslavism.²⁸¹ In contrast to Meštrović's integral Yugoslavism, Vanka's work reinforces the view of Yugoslavism perpetuated by Lada's previous exhibition. In the words of scholar Dennison Rusinow, this second vision of Yugoslavism, "acknowledged and approved enduring separate nationhoods and sought federal and other devices for a multi-national state of related peoples with shared interests and aspirations."²⁸²

The subjugation and suffering of the South Slavs across time is the larger theme that unites Meštrović's *Kosovo Cycle* and Vanka's *Our Mothers* in their expression of Yugoslav nationalism. The suffering of the South Slavs was used repeatedly as evidence for the need of a Southern Slav state. Serbia's Prince Regent Aleksandar even stated in a declaration issued at the beginning of World War I on 29 July that the Habsburg Monarchy did not acknowledge the "sacrifices for the Empire" made by their Southern Slav citizens.²⁸³ Again at the end of the war, this same evidence was being leveraged by Meštrović and Vanka to convince those at the Paris

²⁸⁰ This assumption about ethnic populations is based on ethnic maps made by the Germans in 1941, derived in turn from 1931 census results about spoken language and religion. These maps reveal that Dvoranci or Jamnica were ethnically Croat. Wilfried Krallert, "Volkstumskarte von Jugoslawien," (Vienna: Wilfried Krallert, 1941).

²⁸¹ In 1923, upon seeing the work in Vanka's studio, director of the Zagreb Museum of Arts and Crafts (Muzej za umjetnost i obrt), Antun Jiroušek, wrote: "In *Our Mothers* the artist shows the grief of Croatian mothers for lost sons, who died in the last bloody war. In it is expressed the symbolic sorrow of all Croatian mothers and represents this terrible tragedy, which took place in almost every one of our villages." As discussed in Chapter 2, due to the time period in which he was writing, Jiroušek was inclined to nationalist interpretations of Vanka's depictions of folk culture. Jiroušek, "Naše slike," 118-19.

²⁸² Rusinow, "The Yugoslav Idea Before Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, ed. Djokić, 26.

²⁸³ Quoted in Mitrović, "The Yugoslav Question, The First World War and The Peace Conference, 1914-20," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, ed. Djokić, 43.

Peace Conference that these peoples deserved a shared, sovereign state. Meštrović's and Vanka's works are placed in very different time periods, but significantly in both this suffering operates with a certain timelessness. Meštrović pulls from the mythic medieval past—popular fodder for legitimizing modern nation-states. Even as it is placed in the mythic past, Meštrović's *Kosovo Cycle* reads as the suffering of the Slavs across the centuries. As art historian Steven Mansbach observes: "The slain Slavic warriors on Kosovo's fields became transformed through epic poetry and myth making into the heroic embodiment of Balkan liberation from foreign powers—Turkish, Austrian, Italian, and Hungarian."²⁸⁴ Through his dignified and heroic treatment of these mythic Serbian fighters, their motives, and their actions, Meštrović's *Kosovo Cycle* ennobles Yugoslav suffering at the hands of various foreign powers.

In contrast, Vanka seems to have chosen to keep his work in the present, or at least the recent past. Given the date of its production, *Our Mothers* presumably shows a Croat soldier who has died fighting for Austria-Hungary—perhaps even in the campaign against Serbia. However, a close look reveals few identifying details in the soldier's uniform. Although the soldier's injuries are highlighted, his rank and allegiance remain unknown. This distinct contrast between the regionally-specific treatment of the women's dress and even the decorative lace under the casket and the total anonymity of the soldier's allegiance is striking. This could operate in two ways. First, this soldier could have been one of many volunteers who deserted Austria-Hungary and fought for Serbia or other allied forces. On the other hand, there is no clue in the scene to tell to the viewer if this man died in the Great War or some other war of the previous years or centuries, and this may be key to understanding *Our Mothers*.²⁸⁵ While Vanka's work continues

²⁸⁴ Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890-1939*, 222.

²⁸⁵ It might be helpful to note that folk dress was still commonly worn by lower classes in the marketplace and by middle and upper classes for special occasions in both rural and urban Croatian regions up until the interwar period.

this same theme of suffering, nothing about this image heroicizes the soldier's actions or suggests the patriotic fervor that would validate this soldier's death or the death of so many in the graves behind him. Meštrović's heroes fight for their own freedom. In this quiet Croatian village, soldiers die fighting in an anonymous war fought for foreigners without sense or legitimacy.

Woodrow Wilson brought his Fourteen Points to bear on the Paris peace proceedings by emphasizing national determination and refusing to acknowledge secret treaties. This opened the way for the European Great Powers to reckon with the existence of the KSHS and to dissolve the secret Treaty of London that would have given large parts of the Adriatic coast to Italy. On 26 April, just two weeks after the opening of *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves*, the Supreme Council at the Paris Peace Conference gave official recognition to the KSHS delegation. Britain finally acknowledged the new country on 2 June and France followed suit on 5 June.²⁸⁶ However, Italy's ongoing irredentism forced the newly declared Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and Italy to sign the Treaty of Rapallo on 12 November 1920 which gave Italy parts of the current-day Slovenia and Croatia including the peninsula of Istria, the city of Zadar, and several islands. These losses were the root of much interwar political tension as Croats and Slovenians blamed the central Belgrade government for the Treaty, which helped fuel the rise of specifically Croatian nationalism.

Vanka never sold *Our Mothers*. The fact that he kept it in his possession even as he immigrated to the United States in 1934, seems a testament to its exceptional and personal nature for him as a reminder of the sacrifices and suffering of the Great War. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, he reproduced the painting as part of a 1937 set of murals in St. Nicholas Croatian

²⁸⁶ Mitrović, "The Yugoslav Question, The First World War and The Peace Conference, 1914-20," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, ed. Djokić, 56.

Catholic Church which served a large enclave of Croatian steel workers and their families in Millvale, Pennsylvania. In the new context of the Millvale Murals, *Our Mothers* Vanka integrated the work into a mural program representing Croatian-American identity. Painted to be exhibited in the *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves*, Vanka saw the work at that time as pushing for Yugoslav unity, not Croatian nationalism. Like many other Croatian artists and intellectuals, Vanka had supported Yugsolavism at the end of the Great War and used his art as means to do so. However, the realization of a Yugoslav state and its inability to resolve the Croatian question, created a mood of disillusionment among many in interwar Croatia who felt the new state had failed to provide neither political autonomy nor an improved economic and social situation for many. Artists soon moved towards finding means to express a distinctly Croatian nationalism rather than a joint Yugoslavism.

4.2 LJUBO BABIĆ AND “NAŠ IZRAZ”

After his 1915 exhibition *Intimna Izložba: Maksimilijan Vanka* at Salon Ullrich, Vanka did not hold another solo exhibition for over a decade.²⁸⁷ When he finally held a small solo exhibition in a couple of rooms at Salon Ullrich in 1930, Vanka was quoted as saying he had been hard at work developing a new form of expression: “I lived through an inner struggle. I wanted to settle with the decorative and surface elements, I felt that I concerned myself too long with the purely ethnographic, with the decorative. I wanted to get rid of all the elements that

²⁸⁷ *Intimna izložba: Maksimilijan Vanka*, (Zagreb: Salon Ullrich, 1915). This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti. The negative reception of some aspects of his folkloric works in 1915 as documented in reviews is discussed in Chapter 2. He exhibited so many works in the 1920 Lada exhibition that it might be interpreted as a type of solo show. *Lada 1920.: Izložba "Lade"*.

were not purely painterly.”²⁸⁸ That new style was visible. His folkloric works of 1930 dropped their focus on regionally specific material folk culture in favor of narrative driven depictions of folk culture. Landscapes depicting the countryside and highlighting the traditional wood architecture of the rural areas around Zagreb had always appeared prominently in his work, but in his large 1934 farewell exhibition held in Zagreb’s Umjetnički paviljon landscapes took on new prominence in his work. The exhibition boasted twenty-five painterly oil and watercolor landscapes done around Zagreb and the island of Korčula with no focus on folk culture (see *Olive Tree, Korčula*, c. 1932).²⁸⁹ What caused these changes in Vanka’s style and output in the early 1930s? They appeared following a period of collaboration with artist Ljubo Babić (1890-1974) and his Grupa Trojica (Group of Three) at the end of the 1920s. In his foundational and encyclopedic work *Twentieth-Century Croatian Painting*, Croatian art historian Grgo Gamulin considered these expressionist landscapes the pinnacle of Vanka’s career. Gamulin bemoaned the interruption of this development in Vanka’s work caused by his departure to the United States, “just at the time when he began to paint landscapes in much simpler colors on Korčula after 1930, close in many ways to those of Ljubo Babić...”²⁹⁰ So what did Babić’s and his Grupa Trojica’s work look like and how did they influence Vanka?

If Ivan Meštrović was the most well-known modern Croatian artist—and probably even the most well-known Yugoslav artist—on the international scene, in the domestic Zagreb art

²⁸⁸ “Ich haben einen inneren Kampf durchlebt. Ich wollte mit den dekorativen und Flächenelementen abrechnen, ich fühlte, daß ich mich zulange mit dem rein Ethnographischen, mit dem Dekorativen, beschäftigt habe. Ich wollte wieder aller Elemente, die nicht rein malerisch sind, los werden.” V, “Ausstellung Maksimilijan Vanka,” *Morgenblatt*, 16 March 1930. *Maksimilijan Vanka: MCMXXX Galerija Ullrich, 17. - 27. III.*, (Zagreb: Galerija Ullrich, 1930). Other write-ups of the exhibition include “Izložba Maksimilijana Vanke u Salonu Ullrich od 7.-20. o. mj.”; Ande, “Impresije sa Vankine izložbe slika,” *Riječ*, 29 March 1930; Ć, “Izložba Slika Maksimilijana Vanka,” *Ženski list* 6, no. 4 (April 1930).

²⁸⁹ *Maksimilijan Vanka: MCMXXXIV* (Zagreb: Tiskara Narodnih Novina, 1934). This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti.

²⁹⁰ Gamulin, “Maksimilijan Vanka,” 180.

world, Ljubo Babić was among the most prominent artists in the interwar period. Vanka and Babić were contemporaries and their early careers developed along similar trajectories. When Vanka studied with Čikoš Sesija from 1908 to 1910 at the Zagreb College for Arts and Crafts (*Viša škola za umjetnost i umjetni obrt*), he overlapped several years with Babić, who studied there with painter and printmaker Menci Clement Crnčić from 1907 to 1911.²⁹¹ Babić quickly emerged as one of the brightest young artists on the Zagreb art scene in the years leading up to World War I, becoming known for his modern graphic design in prints, books, and posters. While still a student in Zagreb, Babić took part in Medulić's 1910 exhibition *Despite These Unheroic Times*. Meštrović and printmaker Mirko Rački invited Babić to contribute to a cycle of works that brought together several artists in various media to visualize passages of folk ballads about the legend of Prince Marko. Linked in content to Meštrović's *Kosovo Cycle*, Prince Marko was a mythic Serbian prince who fought the Ottoman Empire in the period following the defeat at the Battle of Kosovo. The catalog included passages from the folk ballad illustrated with the accompanying artworks including Babić's contribution.²⁹² During this time when Yugoslav ideas were prevalent among Croatian artists and intellectuals, Babić took part in the Medulić exhibition. He also exhibited seven works in the 1919 *Exposition des Artistes Yougoslaves* in Paris.

Although Vanka and Babić had similar approaches to art and identity early in their careers, Babić's politics changed drastically over the course of the interwar period. Three decades later in his 1943 treatise *Color and Harmony: Contributions to an Understanding of Croatian Peasant Art*, Babić criticized the Medulić exhibition, conveniently leaving out his own

²⁹¹ The best introduction to Babić's life and work is the catalog of a recent exhibition: Ivanka Reberski, Libuše Jirsak, and Lada Bošnjak Velagić, *Ljubo Babić: Antologija* (Zagreb: Moderna Galerija, 2010).

²⁹² *Nejunačkom vremenu uprkos: Izložba Medulića*. This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti.

participation.²⁹³ Writing from the Independent State of Croatia—a Croatian fascist state set up by the Third Reich during World War II—Babić reversed his position on Yugoslavism, criticizing the Serbian content of the Medulić exhibition. However, rather than frame his critique as an issue of nationalist politics, Babić framed it as an artistic matter by arguing that the work of Meštrović and Rački did little to resolve what he saw as the tension between collective and individual art. For Babić, works of high art based in folk culture raised the question of how to transfer what folk art expresses about the collective, organic whole to a work of high art that is a form of individualistic expression. However, as if to reveal his Croatian nationalism, Babić spoke positively about Meštrović's one work depicting a Croatian peasant, his 1908 *Head of Peasant* (*Glava seljakinje—svoje majke*), based on the artist's mother wearing a headscarf. Babić never openly admitted in his writings on art that his artistic ideas were founded in Croatian nationalism, or even political.

As one of the leading artists and thinkers of the interwar period, Babić's path from Yugoslavism to supporting Croatian fascist nationalism is an important one to trace. Much of the facts of Babić's life and his ideas about "our expression" have been discussed in the Croatian literature.²⁹⁴ Yet, a refusal to deal openly with the fascist history of World War II means that art historians have not dealt with the logical conclusion to which the development of Babić's ideas and treatment of folk motifs led. Historians allude only obliquely to the fact that Babić's artworks and views in the interwar period supported the rise of reactionary Croatian nationalist politics by helping to define the geographic borders of that nation.

²⁹³ Ljubo Babić, *Boja i sklad: prilozi za upoznavanje hrvatskog seljačkog umijeća* (Zagreb: Izdanje hrvatskog izdavačkog bibliografskog zavoda, 1943), 9.

²⁹⁴ The search for national identity in Babić's work has been discussed by Prelog, "Strategija oblikovanja "našeg izraza": Umjetnost i nacionalni identitet u djelu Ljube Babića."; Ivanka Reberski, "Babićeva teza o "našem izrazu"," in *Ljubo Babić: Antologija* (Zagreb: Moderna Galerija, 2010).

Furthermore, Gamulin's text serves as the starting point for those researching Croatian painting, and I find it problematic that his account associates Vanka with Babić's particular brand of Croatian nationalist artistic expressionism. I have seen Gamulin's linkage of Vanka and Babić repeated by other art historians.²⁹⁵ I would argue this is a fundamental misunderstanding of Vanka's work, because Babić's approach to Croatian folkloric motifs and art making will eventually support Croatian fascism and Vanka's will oppose fascism. So at what point do the careers of Babić and Vanka intersect and then diverge?

Like most of his generation from the provincial center of Zagreb (including Vanka), Babić continued his studies internationally and was intimately familiar with both the old masters and contemporary art of Western Europe.²⁹⁶ After studying in Munich and Paris, he returned to Zagreb at the start of World War I and became an instructor at the School of Arts in 1916, where he taught for the next 45 years. Early on, he was a reforming force in the Zagreb art scene as the organizer of the Croatian Spring Salon (Hrvatski Proljetni Salon) in 1916 and the Independent Group of Croatian Artists in 1923. Unlike Vanka, Babić did not use folk culture as a predominant theme in his early work. However, in the mid 1920s he created a handful of works that reflected the growing political turmoil around the Croatian Peasant Party. Although the Croatian regions were now finally unified under one government, from its onset the KSHS was created on unstable footing. Croatians sensed that Belgrade was bartering off sections of the Adriatic coast to appease Italy's irredentism but also to create an economically and demographically weaker Croatia that would not compete with a centralized Serbian power. In

²⁹⁵ One example of this is Marina Bagarić, *Arhitekt Ignjat Fischer* (Zagreb: Muzej za umjetnost i obrt, 2011), footnote 329.

²⁹⁶ In 1910 he received a scholarship to study at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Munich, where from 1912 to 1913 he studied under the influential symbolist painter Franz von Stuck. He exhibited in the Viennese Secession in 1913. Following Munich, he studied another year in Paris alongside renowned Croatian modernist Miroslav Kraljević.

response, many Croatians gathered their energy around the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Stjepan Radić.²⁹⁷

In 1924 Babić captured in *Stjepan Radić in Požega* (*Stjepan Radić u Požegi*, 1924), a sea of peasants gathering for a political rally in a rural town. The crowd is punctuated by a number of Croatian flags and by the limbs of a tree that resemble roots reaching through the people.²⁹⁸ In a more well-known work *Croatian Peasant* (*Hrvatski Seljak*, fig 4.8) painted in 1926, Babić depicted in earth tones the single, monumentalized figure of an older man, depicted straight on in three-quarter length. He wears simple Croatian folk dress, most visible in the white linen pants and tunic. A bright light from the viewer's left illuminates the lines of his face. The most striking feature, however, is the subtle manipulation of proportions—his folded hands at his sides are nearly the same size as his face. In contrast to his calm face, these hands seem ready to act. Babić's *Croatian Peasant* of 1926 seems almost a response to Vanka's 1925 *Zagorje Bride* (*Zagorska Nevjesta*). Both Vanka's and Babić's figures face the viewer and gaze directly out. But while Vanka's folkloric works drew attention to the folk embroidery and ornamentation, Babić covered that up in his painting. His *Peasant* has thrown a plain jacket over his folk dress, with bits of embroidery peeking through only at the waist and the collar. *Croatian Peasant* appeared on the cover of *Svijet* on 27 November 1926. In these images, Babić is on the same leading edge as Vanka of the rise of depictions of strong, powerful peasants in the late 1920s that

²⁹⁷ "Babić war derjenige, der politisch am schnellsten reifte und der niemals aufhörte, mit dem Balkan Krieg zu führen, wobei er keinesfalls zuließ, daß sein Werk mit Propaganda-, Heimatliefe- und Politikmitteilungen verschnitzelt." Interestingly, when Igor Zidić says Babić was the quickest to mature among the members of the Grupa Trojica, he seems to mean that Babić was the quickest to move away from Yugoslavism after World War I and move towards Croatian nationalism in his work and ideas. Already in 1921 Babić insisted in a travel account from Spain that he was a Croatian (not Yugoslav) according to Igor Zidić, ed., *Gruppe der Drei, Grupa trojice: 1929-1935* (Zagreb: Kulturam der Landeshauptstadt Wiesbaden and Moderna Galerija, Zagreb, 1996), 8.

²⁹⁸ Stylized flattened flags were a common feature in Babić's earlier expressionist works (see *Crna zastava*, 1916; *Crne zastave*, 1918; *Crveni Stjegovi*, 1919; *Crveni Stjegovi*, 1921) and are used to great effect here. All are pictured in Reberski, Jirsak, and Bošnjak Velagić, *Ljubo Babić: Antologija*.

I noted in Chapter 3. Such images of powerful peasants appeared in the popular media, posters for the Zagreb trade fair, and other artists' works, and projected a strong vision of the independent Croatian peasant who is monumental and capable, representing political and economic rights. This rise occurred in conjunction with the growing support for the Croatian Peasant Party and resistance to Serbian centralization. In addition, Babić helped organize the festival held in Zagreb that year commemorating the thousandth anniversary of the ascension to the throne of the medieval King Tomislav, which also raised enthusiasm for Croatian nationalism.²⁹⁹

But instead of more images that bring the viewer's attention to the peasant as a strong individual, there is a turning point in Babić's work in 1928. 1928 marked a crisis in Yugoslavian politics following the shooting in the Belgrade parliament and the resulting death of Stjepan Radić. In the aftermath, the 6 January Dictatorship (*Šestosiječanjska diktatura*) of the Serbian monarchy took effect in 1929 and ethnic nationalisms were suppressed. There was a reaction among Croatian artists in the 1930s, who rallied against this perceived domination of Serbian politics, as they became determined to create a distinctly Croatian form of modern expression free from foreign influence but still in communication with the development of modern art in Europe. While feigning an apolitical stance in his writings, Babić was nonetheless committed to promoting a distinctly Croatian art.

Babić had also trained as an art historian and became the first curator of the Modern Gallery in Zagreb in 1919 and an important art critic as well. Babić used art writing in form of art criticism and histories of Croatian art to develop and disseminate his political artistic agenda.

²⁹⁹ According to Zdenko Tonković. Zidić, *Gruppe der Drei, Grupa trojice: 1929-1935*, 14.

In 1929, Babić began publishing about his concept of “our expression” (“*naš izraz*”).³⁰⁰ He conceived of “our expression” as the search for a specifically Croatian visual language. The idea shaped much of his artwork over the next decade, when the number of rural landscapes and images of folk culture in his works increased significantly. In its early phases, Babić’s ideas about “our expression” involved mining the specifically Croatian details of regional landscapes to express something inherent to Croatian culture. He helped legitimize the existence of an independent national Croatian high art by writing a history of it.³⁰¹ It was still the guiding idea when he worked on the first edition of his 1934 history of Croatian art, *Croatian Art in the Nineteenth Century (Umjetnost kod Hrvata u XIX stojeću)*.

Such national [folk] individuality develops over centuries, it is conditioned by geographic and ethnic conditions, and is subject to political fates, or, better and more accurately said, to the un-circumvented laws of human society. National individuality is evident in both the individual and the collective, determining its type, its temperament, its understanding, and its view of the world.³⁰²

A major part of his theoretical ideas about “our expression” was his laying out the dichotomy between two main types of Croatian landscapes: the rocky Mediterranean landscape of Dalmatia and forested hills of Central Croatia (Pannonia). Without stating so explicitly, he uses art politically to define the geographic borders of Croatia as incorporating both of these regions—regions that had been split under Habsburg rule. With rare exception, his landscapes of this period were not pure unpopulated landscapes; they always featured some element of human intervention—houses, a church steeple, a stone path, a peasant—with which Babić could

³⁰⁰ Ljubo Babić, “Hrvatski slikari od impresionizma do danas,” *Hrvatsko kolo*, no. 10 (1929); Ljubo Babić, “O našem izrazu. Uz slike Jerolima Miše,” *Hrvatska Revija* 2, no. 3 (1929).

³⁰¹ In it he noted, “History is one of the main means of political fight.” “Historija je jedno od glavnih sredstava političke borbe.” Ljubo Babić, *Umjetnost kod hrvata u XIX. stoljeću* (Zagreb: Redovno izdanje matice hrvatske 1934), 61.

³⁰² “Takva se narodna individualnost razvija stojećima, ona je uvjetovana geografskim i etničkim uvjetima, a podvrgnuta je političkim sudbinama, ili, bolje i točnije rečeno, neobilaznim zakonima ljudskog društva. Narodna se individualnost očituje i u individuu i u kolektivu, odajući i svoj tip, i svoj temperamenat, i svoje shvaćanje, i svoj pogled na svijet.” Babić, *Umjetnost kod hrvata u XIX. stoljeću*, 5.

emphasize a type of primordial relationship of these people to their lands. In *Figs in Viganj* (*Smokvice kod Vignja*, 1930) Babić tries to capture the essence of this Dalmatian landscape: the grey stone, the steep landscape, and the twisting vegetation.³⁰³ The small figure of a woman, shown climbing up the stairs with her back to the viewer, appears as an integral part of the landscape.

He put these ideas into visual form in the context of the so-called Grupa Trojica (Group of Three), exhibiting with the artists Vladimir Becić and Jerolim Miše from 1929 to 1935. Becić and Miše too had touted Yugoslav rhetoric during the Great War—Miše as a soldier in a remote part of Dalmatia and Becić voluntarily fighting for Serbia.³⁰⁴ But now the Grupa Trojica were unified in their mission to improve the quality both of Croatian art and the Croatian art scene, which they considered stagnant. In addition to exhibiting their own artworks, they also produced texts on modern art and organized exhibitions—most prominently the work of George Grosz and French modernists—that encouraged a better understanding of Western European modernism and an artistic dialogue between Croatia and the West. As art historian Igor Zidić has suggested, the group's claim that the Zagreb art world was stagnant was not true, rather it was likely an attempt to compete with Ivan Meštrović and the leftist group, *Zemlja*, discussed below.³⁰⁵ Paradoxically in their goal to create a purely Croatian art, these artists were deeply inspired by modern French painting, creating works based in truthful observation and careful use of color to express light, space, and atmosphere. In the artworks that Babić created while with the Grupa

³⁰³ This work is exhibited in the first exhibition of the Grupa Trojica, the 1930 Babić-Becić-Miše show at the Umjetnički Paviljon, to which Babić primarily contributed landscapes painted in the area around Orebić in Southern Dalmatia.

³⁰⁴ Zidić, *Gruppe der Drei, Grupa trojice: 1929-1935*, 7.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 6. In 1939 Babić claimed the group came together not for ideological reasons but to make quality art. "Nastala je sa svrhom da se pobudi aktivitet u našem slikarskom životu. To je bio motiv. Nikakva ideologija, nego samo pitanje kvalitete i selekcije." Quoted in Reberski, Jirsak, and Bošnjak Velagić, *Ljubo Babić: Antologija*, 109. From "Izjava profesor Ljube Babića, *Novosti*, 30 November 1939.

Trojica, including *Figs in Viganj*, his thick brushstrokes, rhythm, and interest in color obviously stem from Van Gogh's post-impressionism. Becić painted with the lessons of Cezanne, focusing on the geometry and volume of the figures he painted. Miše's works were marked by precise and carefully modeled compositions, which art historian Ivanka Reberski has called "a masterpiece of Croatian magic realism."³⁰⁶

The influence of Babić's art and ideas on Vanka is significant. In 1928, when Babić, Becić, and Miše had first come together, they had started as Grupa Četvorice (Group of Four) with Vanka as their fourth member. As his colleagues at the Viša škola za umjetnost i umjetni obrt (Zagreb College for Arts and Crafts), Vanka had regular contact with all of them. Vanka exhibited with them only once: *Babić-Becić-Miše-Vanka* held December 1928-January 1929 at the newly founded Salon umjetnosti R. Bačić.³⁰⁷ In 1929, Vanka ceased exhibiting with Babić, Becić, and Miše, who continued exhibiting together as Grupa Trojica until 1935. The sources are all silent about the reasons for Vanka leaving the group. It may have been stylistic—the continuous influence of symbolism in Vanka's work may have proven too conservative for the group's modernist aims. Or it may have been ideological—Vanka may not have agreed with Grupa Trojica's dismissal of the current art scene in Zagreb and antipathy towards the perceived "primitivism" of the Zemlja artists, with whom Vanka had engaged and would soon have a working relationship.

Regardless of his reasons for leaving the group, a definite change can be observed in Vanka's artworks after that period of interaction with Babić, Becić, and Miše. Vanka had received a lot of criticism for the "cluttered" compositions and bright colors of his early folkloric

³⁰⁶ Ivanka Reberski, *Realisms of the Nineteen-Twenties: The Magical, the Classical, the Objective in Croatian Painting* (Zagreb: Institute of Art History, 1997), 240.

³⁰⁷ I have not been able to locate a catalog for the 1928-29 *Babić-Becić-Miše-Vanka* exhibition, so I cannot determine what works Vanka exhibited with Grupa trojica.

works.³⁰⁸ He was thus open to Grupa trojica's expressionist style. As a direct result of his encounter with Babić and Grupa Trojice, landscapes became an important genre of his work in the early 1930s and as Gamulin posits, they emulate Babić's style. Comparing *Olive Tree, Korčula*, c. 1932 with *Figs in Viganj* shows similar Dalmatian landscapes carved in dynamic brushstrokes with a palette knife into thick, textured oil paint. Indeed, many of the reviews of his early exhibitions in the United States where he exhibited his Dalmatian landscapes highlighted their affinity with Cezanne and Van Gogh, similar to how Babić and Becić had been compared to these artists in the Croatia.³⁰⁹ Some of this expressiveness even transferred over to Vanka's folkloric works. Vanka's 1930 *Copranje proti tuči* (*Spell Against Hail*, c. 1930) reflects a distinct change in his treatment of folk culture.³¹⁰ This work depicts a ceremony taking place outdoors against a dark stormy landscape. Four figures gather around a table set with an image of a saint and candles. A standing woman in a white dress raises both arms toward the dark sky, leading the three kneeling figures in a petition to the divine to protect their crops from the approaching storm and from hail. Vanka's former focus on the material objects of folk culture with meticulous replication of embroidered and painted ornamentation seen in *Proštenjari* (1913) or *Zagorje Bride* (1925) is gone. Instead Vanka paints with broader, looser strokes that mask detail.

³⁰⁸ These are discussed in Chapter 2 and include Andrija Milčinović, "Dešković i Vanka," *Savremenik* VIII (1913); Izidor Kršnjavi, "Izložba Maksimilijana Vanke," *Narodne Novine*, 13 November 1915; Vladimir Lunaček, "Iz umjetničkoga svijeta: Maksimilijan Vanka," *Savremenik* X, no. 11 and 11 (December 1915).

³⁰⁹ Jeanette Jena, "Vanka Exhibition Opens in Wunderly's Galleries," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 3 May 1935. See also an unpublished letter from Andrey Avinoff (Director, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh) to Kosto Unkovich (Royal Consul of Yugoslavia, Pittsburgh), 14 May 1935, Maksimilijan Vanka Papers, Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora, Zagreb, HAZU. "Some of the landscapes in particular bear influences of Cezanne and even Van Gogh."

³¹⁰ Vanka exhibited *Spell Against Hail* in his 1930 exhibition at Galerija Ullrich and in his 1934 farewell exhibition at the Umjetnički paviljon. He then took the work to the U.S. where it was exhibited at least once in Pittsburgh at the Wunderly Brothers Gallery in 1935. *Spell Against Hail* was later donated to the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences (Hrvatska Akademija znanosti i umjetnosti) and is currently located at their Galerija Maksimilijana Vanke in Korčula Town on the island of Korčula. The work is mentioned under several titles including *Copranje proti tuči* (*Spell Against Hail*), *Copranje protiv buri* (*Spell Against Tempest*), and *Vračanje protiv tuče* (*Witchcraft Against the Hail*).

In April 1941, when German forces invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, dismantled it, and set up a new state that would cooperate with the Axis powers, Ljubo Babić, continued creating artworks and exhibiting. This in itself did not necessarily denote complicity with the new regime – despite their violence, the Ustaša did not have the organization or control to carry out cultural goals like those of the Nazis in Germany. That is to say - many artists whose work had been deemed leftist in the interwar period or whose works would have been labeled “degenerate” in Nazi Germany because they were so modernist in style continued to be exhibited in the Independent State of Croatia. However Babić did more than continue painting. He provided designs for paper money for the Independent State of Croatia featuring Croatian folk dress and Croatian landscapes. And in 1943, he published the culmination of his developing interwar artistic ideas in a treatise, *Color and Harmony: Contributions to an Understanding of Croatian Peasant Art (Boja i sklad: prilozi za upoznavanje hrvatskog seljačkog umijeća)*.³¹¹ In the work he argued for a truly Croatian art founded in the collective national characteristics of Croatian folk dress, and through systematic scientific analysis he laid out those characteristics. This included, for example, creating color palettes showing the proper colors and proportions of each color used in folk dress of distinct regions. Further, he argued that, “The forms of this costume are organically connected with the people...”³¹² Ljubo Babić was a collaborator in the Independent State of Croatia, and at the end of the war he received a 6-month ban from the postwar socialist government on displaying his work because of his collaboration.³¹³

³¹¹ This was published by the leading publishing house founded in the Independent State of Croatia under the Ministry of Education (Ministrija Nastave). Babić, *Boja i sklad: prilozi za upoznavanje hrvatskog seljačkog umijeća*.

³¹² Ibid., 11.

³¹³ Reberski, Jirsak, and Bošnjak Velagić, *Ljubo Babić: Antologija*, 259.

In *Twentieth-Century Croatian Painting*, Gamulin posited that Vanka was a “fighter for ‘naš izraz’” long before Babić.³¹⁴ However, Babić’s “naš izraz” was an approach that essentialized what it considered to be an eternal, unchanging folk culture, refusing to acknowledge its status as living and changing culture. “Naš izraz” ultimately supported the rise of reactionary nationalism and fascism. These characteristics do not align with Vanka’s deep commitment to improving the status of the peasant and to social justice. Vanka may have cultivated a more painterly and expressionist style in his paintings based on Babić’s work, but he continued to create folkloric works that would draw attention to the dignity of the rural working classes as seen in his Gradski podrum murals of 1932 and his Millvale Murals of 1937 and 1941.

4.3 ZEMLJA AND THE GRADSKI PODRUM MURALS

When the Gradski podrum (City Cellar) reopened in November 1932 after a period of reconstruction, patrons were treated to a set of bright murals depicting folkloric imagery in a naive style that felt fresh, graphic, and modern. For this commission, Vanka left the expressionist style of Grupa Trojica far behind, and painted the murals with a group of young leftist artists. The popular tavern was located in the basement of the City Savings Bank (Gradske štedionice) on the bustling Ban Jelačić square—the main square of Zagreb.

This was an important commission for a significant space in Zagreb. City savings banks emerged as one of the prominent institutions in the capital cities of the turn-of-the-century Austro-Hungarian Empire. In opposition to other preexisting types of banks, savings banks were

³¹⁴ Gamulin, “Maksimilijan Vanka,” 183.

specifically aimed at allowing poorer sectors of the community to safely save and invest their money. The civic importance of these institutions is illustrated by the fact that city savings banks were often some of the most lavish and significant architectural commissions undertaken by leading modernist architects in urban spaces—the most famous examples being Otto Wagner’s Austrian Postal Savings Bank in Vienna (1904) and Ödön Lechner’s Postal Savings Bank in Budapest (1901). Zagreb’s City Savings Bank was founded slightly later in 1913. After occupying several floors in an existing building for a period, a new purpose-built building by leading architect Ignjat Fischer (1870-1948) was begun in 1923, occupied in 1925, and finally completed around 1932.

Alongside the teller’s area, offices, and meeting rooms of the City Savings Bank, Ignjat Fischer included restaurants, apartments, and a pharmacy in his design for the bank building. According to architectural historian Marina Babarić, the Gradski podrum built into the basement of the building soon became a favorite meeting place in Zagreb.³¹⁵ Fischer, who was good friends with Salomon Berger (the collector of folk textiles discussed in Chapter 2), designed décor for the Gradski produm inspired by folk culture. It had dark wood columns, chairs, and chandeliers. The City Savings Bank administration (*Uprava Gradske štedionice*) and specifically the director, Zagreb economist Rudolf Erber (1881-1944) were responsible for commissioning the murals.³¹⁶ Both Fischer and Erber had worked with Vanka on the 1928 exhibition of folk

³¹⁵ Bagarić, *Arhitekt Ignjat Fischer*, 218-19.

³¹⁶ Confirming this commission was an inscription above the doorway in the larger of the two halls in the Gradski podrum. It is written in the kajkavski dialect of Croatian used in the area around Zagreb: “Domorodcem na veselje ovu su pivnicu skinčali mestri: Vanka, Krsto i Željko Hegedušić, Tompa, Kovačević kaj su tak Gospodin Erber zapovedali. Leta gospodnjega 1932.” The inscription, which was meant to be a pun, translates to something along the lines of, “To happiness of the natives the masters Vanka, Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, Tompa, and Kovačević frequented this tavern, which Mr. Erber commanded. The year of our lord 1932.” Here they are masters of painting but also presumably masters of drinking.

handicraft for the Zagreb Trade Fair for which Vanka had designed the poster. Vanka painted Fischer's portrait and was also known as one of Fischer's favorite artists.

Because both the architect and the director were familiar with and fond of Vanka's work, he was the senior artist commissioned for the murals. As critic Ivo Hergešić noted, the content of the Gradski podrum murals followed Vanka's (by then) well-known oeuvre, depicting folk culture from the local Zagorje region.³¹⁷ However, for this project Vanka set aside his usual academic realism, acquired from years of training with symbolists in Zagreb and Brussels and from teaching life drawing at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb. Instead he adopted the naive style used by a younger generation of painters who accompanied him: the brothers Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, Kamilo Tompa, and Edo Kovačević. All of these younger artists were associated with *Zemlja* ("earth"), a group of leftist artists and architects who aimed to produce works that addressed social conditions and fostered a distinctly Croatian modern art.³¹⁸

Zemlja was one of the most influential Croatian artists' groups of the late interwar period and the group's work is especially vital to consider in this discussion of folkloric motifs in interwar Croatian art. Like the related English word "Earth," the Croatian word "*zemlja*" has several layered meanings including soil, land, country, and planet Earth that reference a deep connection to homeland. The founding members included painters Krsto Hegedušić, Omer Mujadžić, Oton Postružnik, Kamilo Ružićka and Ivan Tabaković; sculptors Antun Augustinčić and Frano Kršinić; and architect Drago Ibler. They existed parallel with Grupa Trojica, also coming together in the aftermath of Radić's assassination and exhibiting together from 1929 to

³¹⁷ "Ova stvar povjerena je profesoru Vanki, koji se mnogo zanima za naš hrvatski a specijalno zagorski folklor i nije nikakov novajlija u dekorativnom slikarstvu." Ivo Hergešić, "Nove freske u Gradskom podrumu," *Jutarnji list*, 27 November 1932, 22. Hergešić's article also mentions that Vanka had already been working on a set of murals that had been interrupted and seemingly destroyed by the reconstruction of the City Savings Bank. These original Gradski podrum murals which do not appear to match any of the 1932 murals may be the murals reproduced in a photograph of the larger hall in Bagarić, *Arhitekt Ignjat Fischer*, 219.

³¹⁸ They were formally known as *Udruženje Umjetnika Zemlja*, translated as the Artists' Association of Earth.

1935. But in contrast to Grupa Trojica, Zemlja openly asserted leftist politics in their original program and in 1935 did not break up voluntarily, but rather they were banned by the police. Zemlja's original program, approved by the group on 22 May 1929, laid out one main goal for these artists and architects: "independence of artistic expression."³¹⁹ As the means to achieve that the following directives were listed in their manifesto:

1. Fight against directions from abroad, impressionism, neoclassicism, etc.
2. Raise our artistic levels, i.e. fight against dilettantism.
3. Fight against art for art's sake. (Art needs to reflect milieu and respond to vital contemporary needs.)³²⁰

At the same time as they wanted to remove foreign influence from their artwork, they were not opposed to involvement in the international art scene. Rather they listed as one of their working goals, "Intensive contact with abroad (exhibitions comparative here and abroad, reviews)."³²¹ The group had no defined unifying style. Though their central mission was to find a pure form of national expression, their rhetoric and their actual artworks attempted to represent the concerns and values of the rural working class. In comparison to Babić's interest in peasants, Zemlja's approach to folk culture was much more directly engaged in politics.

Grupa Trojica had positioned their artworks, deeply influenced as they were by Western European modernism, specifically against what they perceived as the "primitivism" that was being practiced by Zemlja. Though their original program states nothing explicitly about folkloric subject matter or about a compulsory style, the painters in Zemlja tended to represent everyday events from the life of Croatian villages that often contained dark elements about death

³¹⁹ "Nezavisnost našeg likovnog izraza." "Udruženje Umjetnika "Zemlja" - Program," *Podravski Zbornik* 35 (2009): 171.

³²⁰ "Sredstvo da se to postigne: 1. Borba protiv kurseva iz inostranstva, impresionizma, neoklasicizma itd. 2. Dizanje likovnog nivoa tj. Borba protiv diletantizma. 3. Broba protiv lar-pur-lara. (Umjetnost mora odražavati milje i odgovarati suvremenim vitalnim potrebama.)" Ibid.

³²¹ "Intenzivni kontak s inozemstvom (izložbe komparativne ovdje i vani, revija)."

and violence. This manifested itself in a naive style best embodied by the work of Krsto Hegedušić (1901-1975), who was elected secretary of Zemlja when the group was initiated and remained in this role throughout its existence (see for example *Jogenj*, c. 1934).³²² Their work drew inspiration from contemporary leftist German artists and architects, especially George Grosz, whose exhibition in Zagreb's Umjetnički paviljon in 1932 was organized by Ljubo Babić and Zemlja. Hegedušić's works, as well as those of other members of Zemlja, show a firm refusal to paint idealized images of peasants or rural landscapes. In his paintings, peasants are not shown in their formal folk dress with its regional specificities. Rather the plain, everyday, and indistinct becomes the subject of these works, often producing dreary images about the harsh reality of rural life during this period. In 1930, Hegedušić even began teaching peasants to paint in the rural village of Hlebine, thus founding an entire school of Croatian naive art that would spring from that village. In this way he firmly broke the boundary between fine arts and low arts, and instilled folk culture with new life, in a movement of Croatian naive art that has continued up until the present.

After his collaboration with Zemlja, Vanka's work also became more openly leftist. In Vanka's 1934 departing exhibition in the Umjetnički paviljon in Zagreb, Josip Bobek interpreted *Our Mothers* as representing all mothers who had lost sons in the Great War, and saw the painting as part of a larger series of works dealing with "social themes" in which Vanka portrayed workers and farmers.³²³ This included Vanka's painting "The Wounded Comrade,"

³²² Like the German Expressionists before them, they took up the palette and sometimes even the technique of glass paintings, often seen in rural regions.

³²³ Josip Bobek, "Ausstellung Maksimilijan Vanka," *Morgenblatt*, 11 April 1934, 4.

which, according to Bobek, Vanka supposedly based on the February 1934 events of the Austrian Civil War between socialists and conservatives in Vienna.³²⁴

The 1932 Gradski podrum murals decorated two oblong rectangular halls separated from the main space of the tavern. The larger of the two halls was purportedly called “Švema” meaning everybody, and was probably regularly open to the public. The smaller hall was probably reserved for smaller groups of 10-20. Today, the Gradski podrum murals painted in 1932 (or at least those painted in the larger hall) no longer exist. In 1946, as Yugoslavia emerged from the rubble of war, the murals were painted over with a new set. Thus, the sources available to reconstruct the content of these 1932 murals are black-and-white photographs that do not provide a clear image of Vanka’s entire contribution to the murals, and some preliminary sketches that Vanka produced, but used only as a rough guide to his contributions. The Gradski podrum murals received limited media coverage, but Ivo Hergešić praised the murals in *Jutarnji List*, saying they deserved the attention of the public and of the critics.³²⁵ As far as my research has shown, these murals have received almost no scholarly attention. Architectural historian Marina Bagarić discusses the murals in her book *Arhitekt Ignjat Fischer* in the section addressing the City Savings Bank.³²⁶

Due the cooperative effort used to paint the 1932 murals, their style and content displayed a hybrid nature. They balanced Vanka’s tendency toward almost ethnographic renderings of folk customs with Zemlja artists Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, Edo Kovačević, and

³²⁴ “Die Tragödie des Arbeiters, der sich gegen Entrechtung auflehnt, behandelt das Bild ‘Der verwundete Kamerad’ (17), das unter dem Eindruck der letzten blutigen Ereignisse in Wien entstanden ist.” *ibid.*

³²⁵ Hergešić, “Nove freske u Gradskom podrumu.” In addition, a number of photographs of the murals were included in “Slike: Gradski podrum u Zagrebu,” *Hrvatska revija* 6, no. 9 (1933). Other than these two sources, I found four photographs of the murals located in the Maksimilijan Vanka Papers, Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora, Zagreb, HAZU. The sketches are located in a scrapbook owned by the artist’s family.

³²⁶ Bagarić, *Arhitekt Ignjat Fischer*, 211-23.

Kamilo Tompa's bleaker portrayals of the reality of impoverished rural life. In his article Hergešić acknowledged the surprising cooperative effort between Vanka and this younger group of artists, who "... showed the whole world, that legendary artistic malice endures some exception, that artists of different viewpoints and artistic beliefs can work together and even more inspire each other."³²⁷ More than likely Hergešić was referring to the ideological differences between Zemlja and Grupa Trojica, with whom Vanka had recently been associated. The style in which Vanka's contributions to the Gradski podrum murals were painted imitated most closely the clean graphic style of his 1924 scenery designs for the ballet *Gingerbread Heart* (*Licitarsko Srce*) and his 1928 poster for the Zagreb Trade Fair. This means Vanka had a specific style in which he worked in projects that were meant for a broader public, almost as if crossing over into a folkloric style. The style of the younger generation was influenced by international modern art including both the social realism of George Grosz and surrealism.

Their mural program was carried out in two banquet rooms in the rear of the tavern. The larger of the two was called "Švema," meaning "everybody." Vanka and Krsto Hegedušić split this room. Upon entering the room, everything on the viewer's right was painted by Vanka and everything on the left by Krsto Hegedušić. They worked cooperatively with Tompa and Kovačavić on a mural on the back wall depicting peasants gathering grapes and loading a barrel into a wagon on either side of a central image of a wayside shrine—sometimes called a chapel shrine. If his sketches are any indication, Vanka did not dictate what the younger artists were to paint since the only extant sketches are for Vanka's contributions. However, all of the murals in this room deal with the production and consumption of wine and the fruit brandy *rakija*—a hard

³²⁷ "... pokazalo je svemu svijetu, da legendarna umjetnička zloba podnosi i neke iznimke, te da i umjetnici raznih pogleda i likovnih uvjerenja mogu raditi zajedno i što više međusobno se inspirirati." Hergešić, "Nove freske u Gradskom podrumu."

liquor common throughout the Balkan region. Putting Vanka and Hegedušić's works face to face reveals the differences in content and style. It is apparent in Hergešić's comments that critics still considered Vanka's works decorative despite his attempts to move away from it,

Vanka paints folk customs, he selects only the most picturesque, that which is decorative... Hegedušić satisfies himself with modest scenes from peasant everyday life, which is very close to him. Vanka will surely please urban people more, who will marvel at this vacation, which he conjured up with his frescos. Hegedušić will interest those more who are familiar with the countryside, because they lived for a long time in the countryside with peasants.³²⁸

Like critic's responses to the 1913 *Proštenjari* documented in Chapter 3, Hergešić also reacts to Vanka's peculiar mix of the real and the imagined in his folkloric works. In the Gradski podrum murals, Vanka's decorative compositions filled with swags of flowers and his jovial content depicting drinking traditions were taken together by Hergešić as placating a middle-class urban audience. In comparison, Hegedušić painted the commonplace reality of rural life in his contributions to the big hall. However, Vanka, even while working in this stylized mode, continues to emphasize the detail of folk dress in murals and thus material reality of folk dress—something Zemlja tends to completely ignore. In the Gradski podrum murals, Vanka still continues his efforts to help elevate traditional applied art in the eyes of urban inhabitants.

Each of Vanka's murals in this room was based on the lyrics of a different folk song, most concerning drinking and wine making. As with some of his other large format folkloric works, these lyrics appear in scrolls. Just to the right of the entrance was Vanka's first mural over which a banner flew, "Jesem repu sijal, žena veli mak," a folk song that roughly translates

³²⁸ Ibid., 22. "I Vanka slika narodne običaje, a dok on bira samo ono najslikovitije, ono što je dekorativno i svetački iznimno. Hegedušić se zadovoljava sa čednijim prizorima iz seljačke svagdašnjice, koja mu je veoma bliza. Vanka će se zacijelo više svidjati gradskim ljudima, koji će se diviti ovoj feerije, koju je dočarao svojim freskama. Hegedušić zainteresirat će više one, koji poznaju ladanje, jer su dugo živjeli na ladanju i sa seljakom."

as “I sowed turnips, wife says poppies”.³²⁹ It depicted a man and woman in Šestina folk dress standing in a farm field. While the man throws a handful of seeds onto his field and turnips sprout at his feet, a woman faces the man gesturing towards the flowers on the right. Going counterclockwise, the adjacent long wall was divided by architectural bands into three sections, each painted by Vanka. These three sections most likely corresponded to three watercolor studies in an album located in the Vanka-Brasko Family Archive in Rushland, Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, the first section of the mural is not clearly visible in any of the available photographs. This section could correspond to the study inscribed with the folk lyric “Nejdemo dime dime, do zore, Nek baba brunda,” which translates to another lyric about drinking: “We don’t go home, until dawn, Let Grandmotehr growl” (fig 4.16). In Vanka’s study three men join arms while dancing in a circle. Their dancing threatens to knock over a table, and an older woman on the right warns them menacingly with a wag of her finger. The second section was inscribed with lines from the song “Zato braćo pijme ga” (“Therefore brothers we drink it”).³³⁰ This section depicted four men gathered around a table drinking, one of whom has passed out. Next to them a barrel ferments. The third section depicted Saint Martin in a chariot being pulled by one of his attributes, a flock of geese.³³¹ In Croatia Saint Martin day is traditionally considered the date on which the fermenting grape juice becomes wine.

Vanka’s mural certainly appears more ornamental than Hegedušić’s. Vanka framed his scenes in curving swags of flowers and filled them to the brim with dancing and moving figures. Hegedušić’s compositions, on the other hand, show less crowded and compositionally quieter

³²⁹ As with his other works, all of Vanka’s folk lyrics in the Gradski podrum murals are written in the kajkavski dialect associated with the region around Zagreb and spoken by few Croats today. These are difficult to translate without the assistance of a native dialect speaker.

³³⁰ In his watercolor study, Vanka inscribed the image with the line “Pijme ga, pijme ga, se do dana belega,” roughly translated as “We drink it, we drink it, until the day is white.” But the portion of the mural visible in the image shows an earlier line from the song, starting “Zato braćo pijme ga” - “Therefore brothers, we drink it.”

³³¹ It is inscribed with the folk song lyric, “Onda bu došel Sv. Martin on ga bu krstil ja ga bum pil.”

scenes. His scenes strike the viewer not as staged or chosen at the zenith of narrative excitement, but rather as candid and commonplace. The three sections on his wall show a man siphoning wine into a jug in a kitchen, five figures seated around a table in various states of drunkenness, and a man tending to rakija production while four more men gather around a table drinking.

A smaller hall known as the “yellow hall” was painted with another smaller set of murals dealing with folk culture. Vanka set the program for these images, but was assisted by the younger artists. According to Hergešić, who called this work a colorful embroidery (“*šareni gobelin*”), this room depicted the four seasons and accompanying folk activities.³³² No in situ photographs of the smaller hall have been located, but presumably an image in *Hrvatska revija* depicts a scene from that mural.³³³

In the small hallway that connected these two halls to the open space of the tavern, Vanka allowed the younger artists free reign to paint what they wanted. In this space Hergešić said works of true surrealism were painted. A painting labeled as being by Željko Hegdušić and Kovačević was depicted in both *Jutarnji List* and *Hrvatska Revija*. Though still representational this work was much more abstract. It shows a phantom-like figure floating above a landscape conveyed in the most minimal flat tone. A single larger-than-life flower reaches up towards the floating figure.

The folkloric imagery in the Gradski podrum murals bore political meaning. By depicting distinctly Croatian folk culture from the Zagorje area surrounding Zagreb the murals imagined regional and national identity. By doing so in this period following the declaration of the 6 January Dictatorship in 1929 when Croatian nationalism was being suppressed, the murals brought these identities into tension with the official Yugoslavism. However, the casual

³³² Hergešić, "Nove freske u Gradskom podrumu."

³³³ "Slike: Gradski podrum u Zagrebu," 508-09.

environment ostensibly made them toleratable to the authorities—although three years later the state police would ban *Zemlja*. Following World War II, in socialist Yugoslavia, that latent tension in the murals between Croatian nationalism and Yugoslavism apparently grew. In 1946, the entire set of Gradski podrum murals completed fourteen years earlier was painted over with another set of murals. These dealt with the same themes of folk culture and the production of wine and alcohol, but presented a geographically broader array of folk culture representing the diversity of folk cultures that constituted Yugoslavia.³³⁴ A signature reveals that Željko Hegedušić—who had contributed to the 1932 murals—painted most of this new set. However, the centered work on the back wall was contributed by Branka Frangeš Hegedušić—wife of Krsto Hegedušić. Titled *Titovo Kolo (Tito's Kolo)*, it depicted a line of eight figures with intertwined arms dancing a traditional kolo. Each wears folk dress from a different region.³³⁵ A man in a red fez wears the Serbian national costume, a woman with a woven apron probably is from Herzegovina, and a man with a red hat and a red vest with silver buttons laid out in stripes appears to stem from Zadar. Doves, a common symbol associated with Yugoslavia, gather on the ground below holding up a scroll inscribed “Druže Tito—ljubičice bijela,” a lyric from a famous

³³⁴ I visited the Gradski podrum in June 2014, which has been closed to the public since about 1995 according to Denis Derk, “Vanka sedam godina u podrumskome mraku,” *Večernji list*, 29 March 2002. <http://www.vecernji.hr/vanka-sedam-godina-u-podrumskome-mraku-713361> There seems to be some misconception among the Croatian media and perhaps among art historians as well that Vanka’s murals are still present in the Gradski podrum space. When I viewed the space in 2014, Željko Hegedušić’s signed and dated murals were visible in the larger hall, although many had been destroyed by water damage. Who the artist was that painted the smaller hall was less clear. The doorway was decorated in a folkloric pattern clearly related to decorative framing motifs in some of Vanka’s works and sketches, but the simple austere and cartoon-like depictions of peasants painted on the walls look similar to the work of Krsto Hegedušić. No signature was present. None of those murals in the smaller hall had appeared among the photographs of the 1932 murals, although it is possible they remained from that time period.

³³⁵ I base the attribution of this mural to Branka Frangeš Hegedušić on a postcard found in the Louis Adamic Papers, Princeton University, CO246/Box86/Photographs of Adamic, File 15 / unidentified artwork. On the postcard the signature “B. Heg” can be seen on the lower center of the mural, which is no longer visible on the mural today. Inscription on verso of Adamic’s postcard of the Gradski podrum mural handwritten in pencil: “Titovo Kolo / by Branka Hegedušić / fresko / Zagreb.” Branka Frangeš had studied with Vanka at the Viša škola za umjetnost i umjetni obrt (Zagreb College for Arts and Crafts) from about 1924 to 1926. For more information on Branka Frangeš see Branka Frangeš, “Naš narodni kućni obrt i njegovo značenje,” *Ženski List* VI (November 1930): 30-31, and Galjer and Klobučar, “Narodni izraz i nacionalni identitet u djelovanju Branke Frangeš Hegedušić.”

song about the Partisan war hero and Yugoslav dictator Josip Broz Tito. This new set may have been undertaken for practical reasons—perhaps the first set was damaged or neglected during the war—but it seems more likely they were created for political reasons.³³⁶ This variety of folk culture presented would better represent the Yugoslav idea in the Croatian capital. In addition, the 1946 murals also presented a representation of wine and alcohol production that is focused more on manual labor and less on drunken celebration. Today it the damaged remnants of these 1946 murals that cover the walls of the now closed Gradski prodrom.

4.4 PAINTINGS OF PEASANTS AND COMPETING IDENTITIES

This chapter has explored how modern Croatian artists depicted folk culture in a variety of ways to express competing responses to the “Croatian question.” Vanka and his fellow contemporaries—Meštrović, Babić, and Hegedušić in particular—used competing depictions of folk culture to visualize a moment of Yugoslavian political turmoil when identity was unstable, multiple, and even transnational. A final visual comparison between Babić and Hegedušić will emphasize how their political differences were visualized in their artworks. In the late 1930s, Babić’s ideas about “our expression” culminated in a series of paintings he titled *Rodni kraj*, which translates to “birthplace” or “homeland.” The geography of this later series of works transitioned from the distant coasts of Dalmatia to the Central Croatian regions surrounding

³³⁶ Whether it was for practical or political reasons, it is unclear if the repainting of the murals was a point of contention for Vanka. In his 1965 memoirs Croatian émigré and nationalist Vanko Nikolić discussed the repainting of the Gradski prodrom murals as an example of general disregard for Vanka’s work in postwar Yugoslavia. However, Nikolić also provided as evidence that the Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora in Zagreb threw out Vanka’s work, which does not seem to be true. Supposedly this was all told to historian Jure Prpić by Vanka himself in 1961. Vanko Nikolić, *Pred Vratima Domovine: Susret s hrvatskom emigracijom 1965* (1966; Zagreb: Art Studio Azinović, 1995).

Zagreb near his birthplace. His style also changed during this phase. The strong Van-Goghuesque brushstrokes characteristic of the work he exhibited with the Grupa Trojica receded, replaced with flatter brushstrokes that disappear into softer, calmer expanses of color, replicating the farmed patchwork of the Central Croatian landscape. The 1938 painting *Birthplace (Funeral)* (*Rodni kraj (pogreb)*), for example, depicts a group of peasants gathered at a funeral. You can see that, in a similar way to Zemlja, Babić does not idealize peasants in his images; these are not sweet or romanticized images, which Babić also despised. Like Zemlja, Babić picks ordinary, everyday scenes to depict in his works.

However, if we compare Babić's work to Hegedušić's *Jogenj* (1934), Babić's depictions of peasants lack realism. The artists associated with Zemlja worked to capture the ordinary, the quirky, and even the grotesque in their naive paintings of the dark social and economic woes of the rural poor. In contrast, in Babić's painting peasants simply comprise another element of the landscape. He makes them into unknown figures, often scattered or huddled together in collective masses that are either dwarfed by the landscape or simply another feature within the landscape. Babić's 1930s *Rodni kraj* paintings are often painted from the viewpoint of strange, improbable heights with very high horizons, making the figures appear faceless and anonymous. Hegedušić's peasants, on the other hand, appear closer to eye level. Hegedušić placed almost no emphasis on folk dress in his works. The clothing is often so generic it could be from anywhere in Central Europe. In his combination of the styles of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and George Grosz, Hegedušić's figures read as individuals, but not as distinctly Croatian. Babić, by contrast, makes sure to give the viewer just enough information, often in the shape of the women's headdresses, to recognize this as a Croatian folk dress. In their lack of realism, Babić's depiction did not speak

to the social, economic, and political concerns of the rural poor, but rather showed them as part of the mass of the nation.

Babić distilled Croatian folk culture down to a collection of colors and forms that could be adopted by creators of high art to foster a Croatian national identity. Hegedušić cultivated a naive style that focused on the grotesque of the everyday to draw attention to the difficult conditions in which rural populations lived and worked. How was it then that Vanka produced works with two such varying responses to the “Croatian question”? With his chameleonic command of multiples styles—precise academic naturalism, painterly post-impressionism and expressionism, and bold graphic naive approaches—Vanka was typical for his time period in that he responded to the shifting political situation. Vanka produced works supporting a Yugoslav viewpoint during World War I, and answered the call of artists searching for a means to express a distinct Croatian national art after 1928, producing works on both ends of the stylistic and political spectrum. But what remained constant for Vanka was his desire to improve the social and political status of the Croatian peasant. Although Vanka adapted Babić’s painterly style in many of his works starting in the 1930s—a fact often cited by art historians—his political beliefs remained more closely aligned with the Zemlja’s progressive views. After his immigration to the United States in 1934, it is the political influence of Hegedušić and the author Louis Adamic that shines through most clearly in Vanka’s murals in St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church in Millvale, Pennsylvania, rather than Babić’s reactionary Croatian nationalism.

5.0 THE MILLVALE MURALS: TRANSFORMING OLD WORLD CULTURE INTO NEW WORLD IDENTITY

In Millvale, Pennsylvania, across the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh and just slightly north of downtown, was located one of the largest communities of Croatian immigrants in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. These Croatian immigrant steel workers built a church on a hilltop overlooking their community. In 1937, the elders of St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church, with the guidance of their progressive priest of Slovenian roots, Father Albert Zagar, began a search for an artist who could decorate the interior of their church. The church elders thought first of a Croatian artist whom they had encountered in an exhibition held in Pittsburgh two years earlier—Vanka.³³⁷ When an elder of St. Nicholas wrote Adamic seeking out Vanka for the job, Adam wrote back suggesting the future significance of the work for Croatian immigrants: "...his work will not only please the parishioners but is liable to be a treat to America and of great importance to the Croatians in this country..."³³⁸ Here, in a small Croatian Catholic church on the eve of World War II, Vanka recalled two of his earlier folkloric paintings, *Our Mothers* (*Naše Majke*, 1918-19) and *Spring Blessing* (*Proljetni Blagoslov*, c.

³³⁷ "Original Oil Paintings by M. Vanka," Wunderly Brothers Gallery, 2-14 May 1935. The gallery was formerly located at 306-10 Oliver Ave., Pittsburgh, PA.

³³⁸ Louis Adamic to Frank Kolander, 28 February 1937, Maksimilijan Vanka Papers, Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora, Zagreb, HAZU.

1928-29) as he set about designing his murals. These two works had been painted almost ten and twenty years prior respectively in the distant Croatian capital of Zagreb.

Croatian art historian Grgo Gamulin asserted that Vanka's immigration to the United States was largely responsible for removing him from the history of modern Croatian art. In his view, it interrupted the development of an expressionist tendency in Vanka's work, linking him to the Croatian avant-garde around Ljubo Babić, that Gamulin obviously considered stylistically superior to the folkloric works that dominated Vanka's oeuvre.³³⁹ In contrast, I want to assert that the Millvale Murals in many ways form the culmination of Vanka's career. Their creation, their iconographic program, and, most importantly, their meaning are the focus of this chapter. As with Vanka's other works, they bear the burden of both Vanka's intentions for the work and their interpretation and appropriation by Croatian nationalists. This is evidenced by the fact that Vanka's works are now displayed in important spaces of Croatian national imagining in the new Republic of Croatia. When Vanka immigrated to the United States in 1934, he escaped the fascist regime that took control of Croatia during World War II, the Ustaša. By adapting two of his works depicting Croatian folk culture to the Millvale Murals, Vanka made a conscious maneuver not, as some would have it, to use his folkloric imagery to help forge a Croatian-American identity, but rather to fight fascist Croatian nationalism in World War II.

³³⁹ Grgo Gamulin, "Maksimilijan Vanka," in *Hrvatsko slikarstvo XX. stoljeća* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1997), 181.

5.1 BOUND FOR AMERICA

What brought Vanka from the Croatian capital of Zagreb in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to the United States? Vanka's cosmopolitan upbringing in Austria-Hungary and his studies in Brussels meant that he was no stranger to foreigners and fluent in a number of languages. However, it was two Americans who became deeply intertwined in Vanka's life in the early 1930s who altered the course of his life. By this point Vanka was already in his early forties and had been working at the Academy of Art in Zagreb for over a decade.

Vanka first met the young American woman Margaret Stetten (1907-1997) while she was on a European trip in 1926. She was the daughter of the prominent New York surgeon Dewitt Stetten and his first wife Magdalen (Ernst) Stetten. She was not yet 20 years old when Vanka served as her art teacher that summer while she stayed in Zagreb. The two remained in sporadic contact over the coming years.³⁴⁰ When Stetten returned to Europe in 1931 to continue her art studies in Paris and Rome she visited Vanka at his summer residence on the island of Korčula. After their reunion, she was determined to marry Vanka and help support his career. They married on the island of Korčula in August 1931. From the beginning, Margaret tried to persuade Vanka that moving to the United States would boost his career, but for the first few years of their marriage Vanka insisted they remain in Croatia. She soon found an ally in Adamic.

In 1932 Slovenian-American Adamic received a Guggenheim Fellowship. At that time, one of the stipulations of the Guggenheim fellowship dictated that the fellowship must be carried out abroad. So Adamic decided to return for the first time to the Slovenian lands in which he had grown up, now part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Adamic intended to spend his time abroad

³⁴⁰ Letters in the family's possession confirm their contact from 1926 to 1931.

writing another book about immigrants and social issues in America. A year prior, he had published his first and most enduring book – a journalistic account of a century of labor disputes and violence in the United States beginning in the 1830s titled *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America*.³⁴¹ However, Adamic found the way of life and political situation in Yugoslavia so fascinating that he wrote his book instead about his experiences abroad. The 1934 bestseller, *The Native's Return: An American Immigrant Visits Yugoslavia and Discovers His Old Country*, would be received with great interest in the United States, where people were intrigued by this region that had sparked the Great War.³⁴² It introduced many Americans to the political struggles against King Aleksandar's dictatorship in Yugoslavia. Today, Adamic is studied mostly by scholars of labor history and has recently been the subject of revived interest, but in the 1930s and 1940s he was one of the most widely read American authors on immigration and the labor movement, and an early and outspoken proponent of cultural pluralism.

Among the many people that Adamic encountered during his influential year in Yugoslavia was Vanka. Vanka, who at 43 was nearly ten years older than Adamic, became fast friends with the author.³⁴³ In the coming years Adamic would fundamentally change the course of Vanka's career. Together with Margaret Stetten Vanka, Adamic helped convince Vanka to move to the United States, away from the threat of fascism, and promoted the artist's work at every opportunity. He would even facilitate the commission for Vanka's paramount work, the

³⁴¹ The first edition of *Dynamite* was published in 1931 by Viking Press. The most recent edition is Louis Adamic, *Dynamite: the story of class violence in America* (Edinburgh: AK, 2008).

³⁴² Louis Adamic, *The Native's Return: An American Immigrant Visits Yugoslavia and Discovers His Old Country* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934). In 1934, this book was number 5 on Publisher's Weekly non-fiction bestseller list. See "Annual Bestsellers, 1930-1939," University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, accessed January 3, 2011, <http://www3.isrl.illinois.edu/~unsworth/courses/bestsellers/best30.cgi>.

³⁴³ According to *The Native's Return* the two met by chance in Dubrovnik in mid-September 1932, and Vanka and Margaret invited Louis and Stella Adamic to come stay with them in their villa on the island of Korčula for several weeks.

murals painted on the eve of World War II in St. Nicholas Catholic Church in the Croatian immigrant community of Millvale outside of Pittsburgh.

In spring of 1934 the Vankas decided to go to the United States.³⁴⁴ In Adamic's opinion it was not because of his career that Vanka chose to leave the small but active Zagreb art world, where Vanka taught at the academy, received private commissions, and was widely respected by leading artists. Adamic speculated, "What had, I think, really decided him just then was his thought that he had no right to keep his wife and child in Europe, where the dangers of war seemed to be increasing by leaps and bounds."³⁴⁵ Vanka did not want to keep his wife, who was Jewish, and their child in Croatia, and their departure followed soon after Hitler's rise to power.

Vanka held a final farewell exhibition in Zagreb's most prominent exhibition space, the Umjetnički paviljon, in Zagreb in April 1934.³⁴⁶ He filled the large hall, originally built for the 1896 Millennial Exhibition in Budapest, with 72 of his works. The exhibit opened on Easter Sunday with speeches by sculptor Robert Frangeš-Mihanović and scientist Stanko Hondl on behalf of the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences wishing Vanka success abroad.³⁴⁷ Notably, Vanka chose to include in this exhibition almost all of his major folkloric works from the previous two decades. From his series *Beautiful Jela Wove Three Wreaths* (*Lijepa Jela tri vijenca splela*) Vanka included *The Third Wreath She Gave to Her Beloved* (*Treći vijenac svom dragom dala*) painted around 1916. He also included *Our Mothers* (*Naše Majke*, 1918-19), his 1923 *Under the Old Cross* (*Pod starim križem*), his well-known 1925 *Zagorje Bride* (*Zagorska Nevjesta*), and his most recent *Croatian Magic* (*Copranje ili Janica si želi Štefeka z mustači*, c.

³⁴⁴ Vanka did not become an official permanent resident in the United States until 1936. He visited Croatia in 1936 and for the last time in his life in 1938, when he had all of his processions shipped to New York City. He received permanent United States citizenship in 1941 shortly after the second round of murals in Millvale were completed.

³⁴⁵ Louis Adamic, *My America, 1928-1938* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), 161-62.

³⁴⁶ *Maksimilijan Vanka: MCMXXXIV*, (Zagreb: Tiskara Narodnih Novina, 1934).

³⁴⁷ "Jedna interesantna izložba u umjetničkom paviljonu," *Jutarnji list*, 6 April 1934.

1933). The reviews of this exhibition revealed that at the time of his departure Vanka was most well-known for his folkloric works amongst Croatians, but the folkloric works were still not considered the most successful by respected critics. The highly regarded critic Ivo Šrepel described Vanka's ethnographic works as stylized, gloomy, stiff, and empty.³⁴⁸

5.2 "KOLOSALNA" AMERICA

By most accounts Vanka's farewell exhibition had been a success and he had sold many of his best works to patrons in Croatia. However, his exhibitions in the United States, held under the auspices of the Yugoslavian government, proved financially unsuccessful. Adamic testified to the meager success of these exhibitions:

Almost immediately on their arrival in New York, the over-eager Margaret arranged for an exhibition of her husband's pictures in a gallery on Fifty-seventh street, but it was ill-managed; the paintings shown were not his best; much of his finest work remained in Europe, owned by private persons and public museums; and the New York art world did not get excited. Later the Yugoslav consul in Pittsburgh arranged an exhibition of his work there, which also set nothing on fire.³⁴⁹

Indeed, Vanka's first US exhibition at New York City's Marie Sterner Gallery 26 November–8 December of 1934 received only short, perfunctory reviews.³⁵⁰ Reviewers gave only a cursory overview of his career—somehow the exhibition brochure failed to mention that Vanka had studied painting in Brussels. Most continued to accentuate the exoticism of his Slavic

³⁴⁸ Ivo Šrepel, "Maksimilijan Vanka (uz kolektivnu izložbu u Umjetničkom paviljonu)," *ibid.*, 13 April.

³⁴⁹ Adamic, *My America*, 162. In the typed manuscript for this book a section followed: "His in-laws, the Stettens, gave a number of parties to introduce him to wealthy New Yorkers who might want portraits painted, but nothing came of this - - I surmised, to Maxo's relief: for, although he wanted to get a start in America and earn some money, in order not to have to live off Margaret's income, he was not interested in doing just anybody's portrait." p. 318, Folder 1, Box 19 A Books: My America, CO246, Louis Adamic Papers, Princeton Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

³⁵⁰ *Vanka: November 26 - December 8, 1934*, (New York City: Marie Sterner Galleries, 1934).

background by recounting an anecdote included in a brochure note about the tradition depicted in *Croatian Magic*.³⁵¹ The *Time* magazine review revealed that reception of Vanka's work was tainted with strong stereotypes about his homeland. The article began, "Yugoslavia is a country half as large as France. Within its borders the World War was started, regicides are bred, opium is produced and the best wild boar shooting in Europe is found." The reviewer then presented the artist's national identity to the American art scene for the first time by saying, "...Like the assassins of King Alexander, Artist Vanka is a Croat."³⁵² Although the article also praised the artist's skill the main focus was on his Slavic heritage. In May of the following year Vanka held a solo exhibition in Pittsburgh at the Wunderly Brothers Gallery that evoked a more positive response, probably because of the large local population of Croatians.³⁵³ It continued with the romanticized view of Vanka as artist on a mission to share his culture: "...it is the vivid earthy life of the people of his country which really fires his brush."³⁵⁴

Adamic tried to help promote the artist's work. On an informal basis Adamic served as a public relations person for Vanka after his immigration. Hardly a review of an exhibition or of the Millvale Murals appeared without a mention of the artist's relationship to Adamic and an

³⁵¹ Ibid. The exhibition brochure included this note about *Croatian Magic* (*Copranje (Janica si želi Štefeka z mustači)*, c. 1933): "On Easter Eve the old women of the village take some young girl into the mountains where they show her heart's desire, as in this case her future husband. She pays for this privilege with chickens, bread, wine, oil and milk, which is boiled. Her hair is cut off and sold, and when it has grown again her wish will be fulfilled." Reviews include "Vanka of Jugoslovakia," *The Art Digest* IX, no. 5 (1934); E.A.J., "Vanka," *The New York Times*, 2 December 1934.

³⁵² "Art: Croat," *Time*, 3 December 1934, 47.

³⁵³ The exhibition "Original Oil Paintings by M. Vanka" was held at the Wunderly Brothers Gallery (formerly located at 306-10 Oliver Ave., Pittsburgh, PA) 2-14 May 1935 under the auspices of the Yugoslav government. An invitation for this exhibition exists in the holdings of the Archive of Fine Arts (Arhiv za likovne umjetnosti), but not a brochure listing the artworks on display. The reviews suggest that it included many of the same artworks as 1934 exhibition held at the Marie Sterner Gallery. The Wunderly Brother's archives have since been destroyed, but the files of the New York Yugoslavian consul could present new data on both of Vanka's 1934 American exhibitions and on the broader cultural mission of the consulate in the interwar period. These documents are now located in the Arhiv Jugoslavije in Belgrade, Serbia.

³⁵⁴ Jeanette Jena, "Vanka Exhibition Opens in Wunderly's Galleries," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 3 May 1935. Other reviews include Dorothy Kantner, "Vanka Opens Exhibition Here!," *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, 3 May 1935.

account of Adamic's dramatic narrative of Vanka's life.³⁵⁵ For example a *Time* magazine review of the 1937 murals reads:

Born in Zagreb, ancient capital of Croatia, Maximilian Vanka grew up with peasants, did not discover until he was a young man that he was an illegitimate son of a noble family. As a fachook (noble bastard) young Maximilian belonged to a well-recognized caste in Croatia under the gay regime of Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph...Abetted by his wife and by No. 1 U.S. Yugoslav Louis Adamic (The Native's Return) he came to the U.S. in 1934...³⁵⁶

In the same vein, it is apparent that whenever "No. 1 U.S. Yugoslav Louis Adamic" received press he often tried to have Vanka's work mentioned as well.³⁵⁷ Through his writings and his sway over the media Adamic transformed Vanka into a figure of Slavic exile. In the author's narrative, exile followed Vanka through nearly every phase of his life, from his unknown parentage and his peasant upbringing, to his escape to Belgium during World War I, and finally to his immigration to the United States. While adding excitement and mystery to Vanka's life, Adamic's narrative often obscured the more complex social and national significance of the artist's work. Adamic even openly admitted in *My America* that, "he interested me less as an artist than as a person."³⁵⁸

Even if Vanka's work was not selling in the United States, Vanka was experiencing a period of significant productivity and grappling with new subject matter as he was introduced to America by Adamic and his wife. Vanka was fascinated by America's industrial society and

³⁵⁵ The narrative that he supplied to the press was expanded in the Bildungsroman based loosely on Vanka's life story: Louis Adamic, *Cradle of Life: The Story of One Man's Beginnings* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936). For more on it see Chapter 1.

³⁵⁶ "Art: Millvale Murals," *Time*, 19 July 1937.

³⁵⁷ For example, see "Vanka's Art Brings Fame to Church," *American-Yugoslav Reflector* 1, no. 11 (1940): 14-15. This brief overview of the Millvale Murals immediately followed a three-page article titled "We Met Louis Adamic."

³⁵⁸ Adamic, *My America*, 156.

landscapes, and startled by the country's vast economic disparities.³⁵⁹ As Adamic recounts the artist spent night and day filling pages with sketches of the people and cityscapes he encountered:

I enjoyed showing Maxo New York. Every few minutes, as we walked in midtown, or in the financial district, or through the Rockefeller Center, he exclaimed, "*Ovo yé kolosalno!* (This is colossal!) *Kolosalno!*" Or, "There is something here! ...power, energy, the future...*Kolosalno!*" The city exhilarated him, and for two or three weeks after he came he scarcely slept. Worn out from eight or ten hours' tramping with him on hard pavement, I left him somewhere late in the evening, then he wandered alone for eight or ten more hours more before he finally went home. And the next day Margaret told me he had been exclaiming "*Kolosalno!*" in his brief sleep, and he recounted to me what he had seen and experienced.³⁶⁰

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, Vanka's works had always shown an interest in bringing dignity to the lower classes, namely peasants, in Croatia. However, now his focus on describing the situation of the lower classes took on new intensity and realism. The prolific number of sketches he produced during his early years in New York and traveling throughout the United States of industrial sites and of homeless people and prostitutes living on the street reveal a critical viewpoint regarding the failings of capitalism that aligned with Adamic's.

In the years after Vanka's arrival in the United States, the artist and Adamic spent a lot of time together. Adamic introduced Vanka not only to the industrialized American landscape and its workers, but also to a new set of ideas about immigration and politics. In 1934 and 1935, Adamic did a speaking tour in which he engaged ethnic immigrant communities in a discussion about their perspectives and experiences and about what he saw as the lack of identity among

³⁵⁹ One newspaper article from 1935 noted that Vanka was, "planning to make an auto sketching tour of America this summer. He hopes to gather enough sketching material for 100 paintings of life and industry, to be shown in Europe as an introduction to America." This plan was apparently never realized, but reveals an ethnographic urge to document and display culture. "Folk Custom Portrayed in Yugoslavia's Painting Exhibit," *The Pittsburgh Press*, 15 May 1935.

³⁶⁰ Adamic, *My America*, 162.

second-generation immigrants.³⁶¹ Vanka often accompanied Adamic on these speaking engagements, which took them to Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., Cleveland, and many other locations. It is logical to assume that they often discussed the topics that Adamic explored in his writings, including the labor movement, American first- and second-generation immigrants and their role and integration in American society, and socialist politics in America and Europe. Adamic, who published a book almost every year between 1931 and 1945, was an astute observer of American society and its newest inhabitants. He was highly critical of the “melting pot” approach of assimilating American immigrants, which he felt left second-generation immigrants rootless. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which limited the immigration of non-Western-European immigrants, was the beginning of a growing xenophobia that turned many Anglo-Saxon Americans against more recent immigrants. Adamic was an early proponent of a type of multiculturalism; he proposed the preservation of cultural identities and traditions issuing from a “common ground” of American prosperity and mutual respect. While Adamic had empathy for socialist ideas in the interwar period, he also retained an optimistic view that, though not perfect, something good would come of American culture and democracy. He wrote, “...I had begun to believe that—in spite of depressions, unemployment, and current spiritual chaos—the United States was the human world’s best long-range hope, the main passage, or certainly the principal way station, to any sort of desirable future...”³⁶² He saw America’s diverse immigrant populations as an asset that would benefit US progress.

³⁶¹ The result of these discussions was Louis Adamic, “Thirty Million Americans,” *Harpers Magazine* 169 (1934).

³⁶² Louis Adamic, *Two-Way Passage* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 4.

5.3 THE 1937 MURALS AND CROATIAN IMMIGRANTS

While not financially profitable, Vanka's exhibition in Pittsburgh had caught the attention of a local congregation of Croatian immigrants looking for an artist to paint the interior of their church in Millvale, Pennsylvania. Millvale was located right across the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh, which at this time was home to the largest Croatian community in the United States—an estimated 50,000 Croatians lived in the city.³⁶³ Most of the men in Millvale worked in the steel mills, and comprised a geographically and economically marginalized community. Franjo Kolander, an elder of the St. Nicholas Croatian congregation in Millvale and editor of the Pittsburgh Croatian weekly *Naša Nada (Our Hope)*, had seen the exhibition two years prior and wrote the artist on 8 February 1937 asking if Vanka would be willing to paint the church.³⁶⁴ Kolander reported that their priest, Father Albert Zagar, was interested in having the church decorated with “something of the folk/national from the homeland...”³⁶⁵ Adamic had received Kolander's initial letter seeking out Vanka and wrote back recommending Vanka both for his skill and because, “Vanka is a great champion of the Croatian people, here as well as in the old country (most of his pictures depict Croatian life)...” These works were commissioned to

³⁶³ According to "Croat: Yugoslav Artist Paints Local Church Murals," *The Bulletin Index, Pittsburgh's Weekly Newsmagazine*, 4 April 1937, 15; "Croatian Murals: Yugoslavia's Best Known Portraitist Breaks With Tradition in Decorating Church," *The Bulletin Index, Pittsburgh's Weekly Newsmagazine*, 24 June 1937.

³⁶⁴ Frank Kolander to Maksimilijan Vanka, 8 February 1937, Maksimilijan Vanka Papers, Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora, Zagreb, HAZU. It seems likely that the letter was sent to Vanka through Louis Adamic given another letter, from Adamic and addressed to Kolander, in which Adamic expressed his pleasure at this opportunity to serve as the messenger.

³⁶⁵ Ibid. “*Da li bi vas zanimala ponuda, da bi iz nutra “izmalali” crkvu? Ja znam, da to nije baš u vašem dosadašnjem djelokrugu, no spomenuo sam mogućnost župniku, koji je bio vrlo zainteresiran i želi, da bi crkvu ukrasio sa nešto narodnoga iz domovine, kako je to nekad učinio Prof. Oton Iveković u hrvatskoj crkvi u Kansas City. Kans.*” In fact, Kolander wrote that is should look something like what “Prof. Oton Iveković did in the Croatian church in Kansas City. Kans.” The murals in St. John the Baptist Church in Kansas City, Kansas were completed by another prominent Croatian artist of slightly older generation, Oton Iveković (1869-1939) around 1910. The letter also stated the congregation expected the costs for the decoration of the church to fall between \$3,000 and \$4,000. This would presumably cover materials and Vanka's payment although the letter does not state this explicitly.

represent Croatian-American identity and experience, and Vanka was chosen to do them because he had created folkloric work in Yugoslavia before his immigration. Adamic had high aspirations for the project: "I visualize the whole project as a possibility of not merely putting a few pictures on the walls of a little church in a suburb of Pittsburgh, but of creating an enduring monument which will interest New York and European critics..."³⁶⁶ The commission, first for a set of murals in 1937 and later an additional set of murals in 1941, led to one of the most radical and dynamic church mural programs in the United States.

Vanka went to Pittsburgh in March to meet with the parish priest, Father Zagar. He and Zagar—who had Slovenian roots and had been in the United States for over a decade—warmed to each other instantly.³⁶⁷ Zagar gave Vanka complete freedom to choose the content of the murals, and indeed to weave in non-religious imagery. Zagar had worked briefly in Italy during Mussolini's early rule and by 1937 was already openly critical of both fascism in Europe and greed in the United States.³⁶⁸ Vanka spent two weeks making sketches, and perhaps to save time or perhaps to bring "something of that narod from the homeland", he reused two compositions from earlier works he had painted in Croatia and a number of elements of folkloristic culture. In 1937 Vanka completed murals around the main altar, on the front and rear walls on either side of the altar, and on the ceiling over the transepts. He began on 9 April and spent over twelve hours a day on his scaffolding painting the murals in a fresco secco (dry fresco) technique using casein tempera paint.³⁶⁹ He finished in eight weeks in time for a public dedication on 13 June 1937.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Zagar and Vanka had taught in Zagreb at the same time—Zagar had taught religion for a period at the University of Zagreb while Vanka was teaching art at the Academy—but were not acquainted then. Zagar came to the United States in 1927. "Croatian Murals: Yugoslavia's Best Known Portraitist Breaks With Tradition in Decorating Church."

³⁶⁸ "Millvale Church Pastor Talks about Dictators," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 20 July 1937, 3.

³⁶⁹ Vanka wrote: "First it is painted with a thin coat of slaked lime over your drawing which shows through you then work as quickly as possible in fresco colors your composition so as to [have?] a local coloring. And you finish by

Included in the 1937 round of murals were monumental depictions of the four apostles seated in thrones on the ceilings over the transepts and a number of painted borders in folkloric patterns that followed the ribs of the vaulted ceilings.³⁷⁰ However this analysis will focus on the folkloric imagery in the Millvale Murals. The majority of folkloric imagery in the murals was painted in the 1937 set including three works in particular that display how Vanka reused elements from his earlier Croatian folk images in ways that created new meaning. Above the altar Vanka painted a monumental Byzantine-style *Madonna with Child*. She holds the standing Christ Child on her lap and the two figures appear against a silver backdrop.³⁷¹ Her appearance conforms to popular depictions of the Madonna in Croatia showing her enthroned and crowned as Our Lady Queen of Croatia. The Madonna icon used in the spring ritual in Vanka's *So That Our Fields May Be Fertile* (*Da bi nam polje rodilo bolje*, c. 1916) depicts her crowned and wearing a blue cape and red dress. In contrast to that icon, the Millvale *Madonna with Child*

working in casein tempera or egg tempera keeping always your wall wet – by spraying – [sic]" James D. Egleson to Maksimilijan Vanka [with handwritten notes for Vanka's response], 24 October 1937, Maksimilijan Vanka Papers, Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora, Zagreb, HAZU. One journalist referred to Vanka's paint as "cheese tempera" which suggests cottage cheese or perhaps some Croatian form of fresh cheese curd supplied by the Millvale community may have served as the binder. "Croatian Murals: Yugoslavia's Best Known Portraitist Breaks With Tradition in Decorating Church."

³⁷⁰ The ornamentation included a pattern of hearts and leaves, a pattern that replicated the icing on gingerbread hearts—a symbol of Zagreb—and a pattern of oak leaves and acorns. According to Adamic "oak-leaf-and-acorn designs...among Croatian peasantry are wish-symbols for strength, health, potency, and longevity." Adamic, *Cradle of Life*, 227. In at least one photograph of the original 1937 murals a *šahovnica*, the red-and-white checkerboard shield used to represent the Croatian regions since at least medieval times, can be seen painted at the base where the vaulted ceiling ribs meet. Notably it has a red premier field, not the white premier field soon to be used by the Croatian fascists.

³⁷¹ The background was originally silver behind the Madonna instead of green, but some changes were made to the mural in 1970 on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Croatian Fraternal Union by Croatian artist Ivan Joko Knežević at the request of Father Romildo Hrboka. This included adding three folds in the lap area of Madonna's garment, which had previously appeared tighter and apparently offended some in the parish. At the same time some of the borders which integrated Croatian folk patterns were painted over. Knežević was invited to add an additional mural, titled *Farewell*, on ground level around the altar depicting thirty-two figures, many in folk dress, including images of Knežević and his wife, Father Romildo and his assistant, church founders based on portraits from around 1900, and even a kneeling Vanka with his daughter Peggy on his knee. It was meant to capture some of the experience of leaving their home and immigrating to the United States. For this reason it is better to analyze Vanka's contributions to the mural based on older photographs produced before these changes, such as the photographs of the 1937 murals in the Louis Adamic Papers at Princeton University Archive. Richard J. Domencic, *The Murals of Maxo Vanka* (Millvale, PA: St. Nicholas Church, 2000), 10; William Pade, "No Spook Haunts New Mural In Famous Millvale Church," *The Pittsburgh Press*, 24 February 1970.

includes the Christ Child, and both figures wear hybrid costumes in bright pan-Slavic red, white, and blue that combine more traditional robes seen in religious imagery with elements of Croatian peasant dress. The Madonna's cape, as well as many of the decorative architectural borders throughout the church, is edged with the same floral ribbon shown in abundance hanging from the bride's hairpiece in *Zagorje Bride*. The Madonna grasps the standing Christ Child with what have been labeled by several writers as large, peasant-like hands. Christ holds aloft a bunch of grapes and a stalk of wheat, which refer to the Eucharist, but also constitute the main crops of Croatia's coast and mainland respectively.³⁷² This Madonna and Christ Child bear national symbols that distinctly link them to the Croatian peasant.

Below *Madonna with Child* the viewer descends to an earthly realm and encounters one of two comparisons of rural Croatian peasants in the Old World and urban Croatian workers in the New World. A scene depicting a Croatian peasant family praying the morning Angelus is positioned left of the altar. To the right of the altar, is painted a scene of Father Zagar kneeling in front of several Millvale immigrant miners and steel workers, one of whom holds a model of the church as an offering. The family of peasants on the viewer's left pray together over breakfast in a field. Behind them is depicted a hilly rural landscape scattered with a wayside cross, a few buildings, and a hilltop church. This work is variously known as *Religion in the Old Country*, *Pastoral Croatia*, *Ave Maria*, and *Morning Angelus*.³⁷³ Both David Leopold and Nicholas Vizner have observed that the composition and some of the figures in this image are adapted from Vanka's *Spring Blessing* painted around 1928 to 1929 (*Proljetni Blagoslov*).³⁷⁴ In particular the

³⁷² Nikola Vizner, "Hrvatsko američki slikar Maksimilijan Vanka" (Sveučilište u Zadru, 2004), 137-40.

³⁷³ On the photographs of the 1937 murals in Adamic's files the mural is called "Religion in the Old Country." Louis Adamic Papers, Princeton Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

³⁷⁴ David Leopold, ed., *The Gift of Sympathy: The Art of Maxo Vanka* (Doylestown, PA: James A. Michener Art Museum, 2001), 29; Vizner, "Hrvatsko američki slikar Maksimilijan Vanka," 137-40.

folk dress and postures of the man and woman on the left were taken almost verbatim from *Spring Blessing*. Vizner identified *Religion in the Old Country* as a Hrvatsko Zagorje landscape due to “the hills, village, little church, fields, vineyards.”³⁷⁵ Yet, the woman’s appliqué vest is from Prigorje area just east of Zagreb.³⁷⁶ A closer look reveals notable differences in the *Religion in the Old Country*. Vanka swapped out the image of kneeling boy in *Spring Blessing* for a young girl modeled on a photograph of his daughter Peggy in a floral-embroidered dress that could broadly be associated with the Mosavina region as represented in *So That Our Fields May Be Fertile*. In his Croatian works, Vanka had emphasized regional specificity. In Millvale, by contrast, he seems to blend together the folk dress of at least two regions in this one work. Possibly Vanka wanted to represent the fact that St. Nicholas’s congregation hailed from various parts of Croatia.³⁷⁷

As discussed in Chapter 3, Vanka’s painting *Spring Blessing* had been made popular in quite an unusual form in Croatia through its inclusion in the December 1929 issue of the popular women’s magazine *Ženski list*. This issue offered their first ever “folk embroidery” (“*narodni gobelin*”) based on Vanka’s *Spring Blessing*. Readers could send off to receive the embroidery pattern for a small fee.³⁷⁸ In that format, I argued, it had served to give women agency in the imagining and creation of their personal identity. Here, transplanted in the Millvale Murals, it

³⁷⁵ Vizner, “Hrvatsko američki slikar Maksimilijan Vanka,” 137-40.

³⁷⁶ As mentioned in Chapter 2, Vanka copied the women’s waistcoat and possibly also the patterning of the man’s embroidered waistcoat from ethnographic illustrations done by his colleague Zdenka Zertić for a 1924 ethnographic article written by the curator of the Etnografski muzej in Zagreb about folk dress in the Zagrebačka gora region around Medvednica mountain. Vladimir Tkalčić, “Seljačke nošnje u području Zagrebačke gore,” *Narodna starina* 4, no. 10 (1924).

³⁷⁷ The congregation of Millvale’s St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church came from various parts of Croatia according to Mary Petrich, who received her early education at St. Nicholas’ school and has been a lifelong member of the church. This is not to be confused with the former St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church located on Route 28 in the North Side of Pittsburgh whose congregation was made up of Croatians primarily from the area surrounding the city of Jastrebarsko.

³⁷⁸ Olga Baldić-Bivec, “Maksimilijan Vanka,” *Ženski list* 5, no. 12 (1929).

again aids in the personal construction of ethnic identity. This time not aimed at women in the domestic space, but to first- and second-generation immigrants seeking to understand how their new lives in the United States aligned with those of their fellow Croatians in Yugoslavia.

The Madonna's mourning of the death of Christ in murals of the crucifixion and the pieta in the front of the church is paralleled in the rear of the church by two images of contemporary Croatian mourning women.³⁷⁹ To the viewer's left, peasant women in Croatia mourn the death of a young soldier, and to the right, immigrant women in the United States mourn the death of a young steel worker. The mural *Croatian Mothers Raise Their Sons for War* is an almost exact replica of *Naše Majke 1914-1918 (Our Mothers)* produced by Vanka around 1918 representing the atrocities of World War I.³⁸⁰ A group of women gather around the coffin of a young soldier with a blood-soaked head bandage and an amputated arm. In the background rows of cross-marked graves fill the hillside leading up to another church. The white dresses that the women wear, with their intricate pleating, are worn as mourning apparel throughout Croatia. However, the shape of the married womens' headdresses reveals that this scene takes place in the Pokuplje region (where Vanka participated in the ethnographic mission).³⁸¹ In the Millvale Murals, as with his other works, Vanka mobilized images of women as the bearers of culture. This melancholy work, brought on by the violence of World War I, did not conform to the proud images of strong peasants that he produced in the late 1920s. By incorporating this image into the church's mural program, Vanka transformed the work into an indictment of yet another quickly approaching World War. Yet these hunched mothers with covered faces deal with the

³⁷⁹ According to Father Zagar, Vanka used almost no models for the painting of the murals, with the exception of his crucifixion scene for which he used a African-American WPA worker named Slim as the model. "Millvale Church Pastor Talks about Dictators," 3.

³⁸⁰ He brought this painting with him to the United States, but reused the other side of the canvas around 1956 to paint *Leper Colony*.

³⁸¹ More specifically the headdress's shape, as well as the pleating and sleeve treatment, points toward the area around Jastrebarsko, perhaps in the villages of Dvoranci or Jamnica as the origin of this folk dress.

unpleasant themes of immigration, labor, and war, unlike the earlier proud, upright peasant women who represented the cultural strength of the Croatian nation. *Our Mothers* was ostensibly created for and exhibited in 1919 at Exhibition of Yugoslav Artists at the Palais de Beaux-Arts in Paris—an exhibition with political aims meant to coincide with the Paris Peace Conference. Therefore, *Croatian Mothers Raise Their Sons for War* has an explicitly pro-Yugoslav history, exhibited in Paris to persuade politicians at the negotiating table of the unified Southern Slav culture of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

As an artist in exile working for a congregation of about 400 working-class immigrant families, Vanka's focus lay in trying to locate Croatian identity within a new international ethnoscape.³⁸² His reuse of images of folk culture produced in interwar Yugoslavia raises the question, if these images had originally been created to exist within the Habsburg Empire and Yugoslavia, what did they now support in Millvale? To answer that there is need to look again at Adamic's explorations of immigrant issues in America. In the mid 1930s to early 1940s, the question of how first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants had and would find their place in American society drove Adamic's work. In the interwar period America was experiencing a crisis dealing with immigrant minorities and how they should be assimilated. Adamic considered the issue of rootless second generation immigrants, which he often discussed in books and speeches under the title "Plymouth Rock and Ellis Island," one of the most pressing issues of the

³⁸² The number of families is referenced in "Millvale Church Pastor Talks about Dictators." It is important to realize that in the late 1930s this was a group of Croatian immigrants who, for the most part, had been in the United States for a long period and had no intention of returning to their homeland. Immigration laws enacted in the United States in the early 1920s had severely limited the amount of new immigrants, especially from Eastern Europe, that could enter the country. Croats also resisted returning to Croatia because of the perceived oppression of the Serbian dictatorship. George J. Prpic, *The Croatian Immigrants in America* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), 251-60.

interwar period.³⁸³ His discussions with immigrant communities during the speaking tour that Vanka had accompanied resulted in a November 1934 article for *Harpers Magazine* titled “Thirty Million Americans.” In it, Adamic argued that because second-generation immigrants lacked knowledge about their inherited cultures they were prone to feelings of inferiority that interfered with their personal and professional success and their sense of identity. He warned that, “Without a vital sense of background, perennially oppressed by the feeling that they are outsiders and thus inferior, they will live outside the main stream of America’s national life.”³⁸⁴ The solution, as he saw it, was a better education for second-generation immigrants about their cultural heritage. His suggestions that learning about a nation’s most famous citizens or reading a classic folk tale would fix a generation’s problems come off as naive, but his call for doing away with the melting-pot approach in favor of respect and recognition of ethnic heritage made him an important early advocate of cultural pluralism. In “Thirty Million Americans,” Adamic wrote that he hoped cultural education would,

...tell them [second-generation American immigrants] what it meant to be a Finn, a Slovenian, a Serbian, a Croatian, a Slovak, a Czech, a Pole, or a Lithuanian, and inspire in them some respect for that meaning: make them conscious of their backgrounds and heritage, give them some sense of continuity, some feeling of their being part of America, in which immigrants like themselves played an important role—part of something bigger and better than the bleak, utterly depressing existence led by them and their neighbors in the grimy steel-mill and iron- and coal-mining towns where they lived.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ See his section on “Ellis Island and Plymouth Rock” in Adamic, *My America*, 187-259. In 1939 he published a broadside questionnaire asking for Americans—both native born and recently arrived—to describe their background and experiences. He gathered the stories of immigrant families and published them as *From Many Lands* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940).

³⁸⁴ Adamic, “Thirty Million Americans,” n.p.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

For Adamic—and I would argue Vanka as well—it was possible, and even preferable, for Croatian immigrants to maintain a distinct Croatian national identity, in order to improve their integration into the United States.

In his 1937 mural program, Vanka does what Adamic is calling for in this article. He gives the second-generation a better understanding of their inherited Croatian culture and its continuity with American immigrant life by laying out parallels that force the viewer to compare the lives of rural Croatian peasants and urban Croatian workers. To do this he reused some of the folkloric imagery he had produced in Croatia before his immigration and juxtaposed these with motifs from the social realist sketches of industrial settings and urban life that he had been making since his arrival in the United States. *Spring Blessings* forces viewers to compare Old World piety with that of the New World, and *Croatian Mothers Raise Their Sons for War* has viewers compare the sacrifices of the Old World to the those of the New World. The 1937 murals emphasized that the injustices suffered by Croatian peasants in the old country in war mirrored the labor struggles of Pittsburgh immigrants in the new world. Now new Croatian-Americans could see how their new lives paralleled the existence and even the sacrifice of their compatriots in Europe, understanding the culture of their heritage even as they adapted to their new lives as Americans. The murals emphasized the contemporary nature of Croatian peasant culture by bringing out previously ignored issues of class, labor, and warfare so important to the marginalized communities of Croatians in both America and Croatia.

These three 1937 murals—*Madonna with Child*, *Religion in the Old Country*, and *Croatian Mothers Raise Their Sons for War*—display the changing content and style of Vanka's peasant imagery in the United States. Even the style Vanka uses in the murals also adds to this sense that value is being placed on social critique. Comparing *So That Our Fields May Be Fertile*

and *Religion in the Old Country* reveals the simplified style used by Vanka in Millvale. Vanka painted in a flatter, slightly more abstract style in the mural format than in his previous, works with extensive ethnographic detail painted in Western academic naturalism. Here he finds a middle ground between that academic naturalism and the flat graphic naive style he used for the *Licitarsko Srce* (*Gingerbread Heart*) ballet scenography and the Gradski podrum (City Tavern) murals, which pays homage to Zemlja. Vanka also borrowed heavily from the style, compositions, and even subject matter of the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, both of whose works the artist knew.³⁸⁶

In the reviews of the 1937 murals, journalists recognized the parallels Vanka was drawing between the lives of Croatian peasants in Yugoslavia and Croatian immigrant workers in the United States. However, Father Zagar reported that the murals were difficult to understand for the older parishioners of the church: “The old folks don’t like the murals...They don’t understand them. They like the big statues of the Saints. But the young ones like them. They’ve been educated.”³⁸⁷ One author followed his descriptions of Vanka’s work with an account of the Croatian people that recognized the political nature of the content: “Intensely nationalistic, proud that they had an independent monarchy of their own as early as 925, Croats are now resentful of their subjugation to Serbian rule in Yugoslavia, constantly seek to overthrow the political yoke. Three years ago Croatian revolutionaries assassinated King Alexander.”³⁸⁸ This

³⁸⁶ Vanka owned the exhibition catalog from Diego Rivera’s 1931-32 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, although it is unlikely that he attended this exhibition in person. More significantly, Vanka exchanged letters with José Clemente Orozco about the technique Orozco used to paint the mural program, *The Epic of American Civilization*, at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. For more on this letter exchange see Vizner, “Hrvatsko američki slikar Maksimilijan Vanka.” A thorough analysis of the relationship between Vanka’s murals and those of the Mexican muralists remains to be undertaken and could contribute to a better understanding of the mural scene of early twentieth-century America.

³⁸⁷ “Millvale Church Pastor Talks about Dictators,” 3.

³⁸⁸ “Croatian Murals: Yugoslavia's Best Known Portraitist Breaks With Tradition in Decorating Church.”

observation was mostly likely prompted not by any comment from Vanka but by the views about the dictatorship expressed in Adamić's *The Native's Return*.

5.4 THE 1941 MURALS AND THE GERMAN INVASION OF YUGOSLAVIA

When Vanka returned to paint more murals—at the request of Father Zagar—at the start of July 1941 on the transept walls and central ceiling, circumstances had changed drastically since 1937. About a year after Vanka had completed the first set of murals in Millvale, Germany annexed Austria in March 1938 and by May 1938 Adamic published a prediction in his memoir *My America, 1928-1938* that war would come to Europe by 1940.³⁸⁹ He would be proven correct when Germany invaded Poland in 1939 triggering war in Europe. Most devastatingly for this community, in April 1941, German forces invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, dismantled it, and set up a new Independent State of Croatia that would cooperate with the Axis powers and supposedly liberate Croats. When the leading party among Croats, the Croatian Peasant Party, refused to cooperate in the governing of this new state, the Germans put into power a fascist party (and known terrorist organization) called the Ustaša, that had been working in exile in fascist Italy since the 1930s. The 1941 set of murals, painted after the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia but just weeks before Pearl Harbor, dealt explicitly with the themes of fascism, war, and capitalism raised by the growing war in Europe and the reality of a Croatian fascist regime.

³⁸⁹ Adamic, *My America*. Adamic in his 1941 *Two-Way Passage*: “In the closing chapter of a book called *My America*, published in May 1938, I said that the ‘next war’—as it was being referred to—would break out ‘before 1940.’ It seemed to me inevitable: Old Europe was heading furiously for a crack-up. And I suggested that the United States ‘immediately’—that is in 1938—appropriate forty billion dollars to prepare itself against the event.” Adamic, *Two-Way Passage*, 3.

Vanka dedicated the 1941 murals to Adamic for all of the work he had done in promoting and discussing Yugoslavia in the United States. In the early months of 1941 Germany had put pressure on the Belgrade government and Regent Prince Paul to decide a course for Yugoslavia in the war. Adamic had considered himself a “conditional isolationist” in the late 1930s, but, when Yugoslavia started to be pressured in 1941, Adamic began to want to join the fight in Europe against Hitler and to move away from isolation. Adamic thought he spoke for many other Yugoslav-Americans when he sent a telegram to Croatian Peasant Party leader Vladho Maček (with copies sent to all the major Yugoslav newspapers) urging Yugoslavia to not submit to Hitler but to resist even it meant shedding Yugoslav blood.³⁹⁰ Adamic did not know if it had been published or contributed to the military coup that occurred shortly thereafter and resulted in Germany's invasion of Yugoslavia. While Vanka was busy at work on the Millvale Murals, Adamic published his newest book, *Two-Way Passage* on 14 October 1941. As Adamic saw it, the task of rebuilding Europe after the fascist powers had been removed would fall to America. In *Two-Way Passage* and a series of newsletters that followed it, he expounded a rather unconventional suggestion, which he called the “Passage Back” for dealing with this. He suggested harnessing the ingenuity of American immigrant groups by forming them into advisory groups that would be preparing to return to their countries of heritage at the end of the war in order to help establish transitional governments that would become democratic nations. The idea was to bring American values back to Europe. It is clear that Adamic and Vanka, both leftists, wanted Yugoslavians to fight against the German fascists, and condemned them for starting another war.

³⁹⁰ Adamic thought Yugoslavia “...must fight, if only as a token. It must not just fold up. ...This was the sentiment also of other immigrants from Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia whose letters and telegrams reached me during the next few days, urging me to ‘do something’ about it.” Adamic, *Two-Way Passage*, 182.

In 1941 Vanka added more religious subject matter including scenes from the Old and New Testament, along with representations of St. Francis, St. Clare, and angels. Most striking however, was his increasingly radical critique of war and capitalism: A Madonna and a crucified Christ appear as defiant pacifists in the midst of World War I battlefields on low ceilings in the rear of the church, and a pious immigrant family's meager meal is contrasted with a wealthy capitalist's rich food and servant near the rear entrance. Asked about his striking image of injustice wearing a gas mask and bearing a scale where gold coins outweigh the Eucharistic bread, Vanka was recorded as saying, "Hitler says march in, take all, go into Czechoslovakia, into Poland, into all countries. There is no justice today."³⁹¹

Included in the 1941 round of murals was a figure titled *Mati, 1941* of a Croatian mother with her hands and legs chained to a cross against the backdrop of a war torn landscape. Her image serves as a pendant to a haunting personification of Injustice in a gasmask on the opposite side of the church. In comparison to the female embodiment of Croatia in Vanka's 1928 Zagrebački Zbor poster this image of Croatia is profoundly melancholy. Her posture does not at all mimic the strong peasant woman in Vanka's poster who looks out at the viewer with wreaths held aloft. Instead this Croatian mother bows her head in resignation. The bright and ornate folk dress from the poster has been replaced with a plain white habit that resembles the mourning apparel from *Croatian Mothers Raise Their Sons for War*. This figure no longer has the enormous skirt that serves almost as a protective shield to the proud peasants at her feet. Instead her thin skirt reveals the contours of her chained legs, and the people's hands reach out to her from behind bars amidst the rubble of destruction. At her feet rests an open book inscribed with the word "Mati", meaning Mother, and a dedication to Adamic. Indeed the author, whose work

³⁹¹ Douglas Naylor, "Millvale Church Frescoes Show Anti-War Sentiment," *The Pittsburgh Press*, 14 November 1941.

also reflected the mounting labor tensions in the United States and political tensions in Yugoslavia, had played a large role in this transformation in Vanka's peasant imagery. From the left (representing perhaps the "West") a smaller pair of free hands reach out to help this Mother Croatia. A linden tree branch blossoms next to them in a symbol of hope. This may be a reference to the ideas of Adamic's *Two-way Passage*, that American immigrants would return to their homelands to help rebuild and establish democracies.³⁹² Vanka described *Mati* to a journalist:

In the foreground at the right is a full length figure, 15 feet high, depicting a mother. She is chained to the cross. Her cramped feet touch an open book on which I have written a dedication to Louis Adamic, who wrote so much about the county of Yugoslavia.

This figure of an enchained mother shows the suffering of the Christian mother of 1941, but symbolically represents the oppressed countries of Europe, acquired by the Gestapo, and submitted to brute force.

The mother is enchained and crucified, because for one assassinated soldier they now kill hundreds. At her feet is a destroyed church and town, and a jail, all bloody, to show the cruelty. Hands are reaching through the bars of the jail, asking for help from the mother country, but she can do nothing.³⁹³

Over two decades later, in 1966, the Croatian emigrant writer and editor Vinko Nikolić, a former collaborator with the Croatian fascist regime, spoke about this painting in his memoirs shortly after Vanka's death in 1963. For Nikolić, this enchained personification of Croatia, represented not the chains of German and Croatian fascism, but instead a prediction about Croatia's contemporary entrapment within the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia—he was thus referring the idea of Yugoslavia as a "prison of nations." He wrote, "I was especially captivated in front of the image, which shows Croatia 1941, crucified, in agony. What did the artist want to say with

³⁹² Adamic, *Two-Way Passage*.

³⁹³ Naylor, "Millvale Church Frescoes Show Anti-War Sentiment."

this work? Was it a prophetic vision of her future torment, which still today has not ended?”³⁹⁴

Nikolić thus takes part in a long tradition within the diaspora community and later within the newly founded Croatian Republic of the 1990s of misappropriating Vanka’s folkloric works in support of reactionary Croatian nationalism. This is the type of appropriation that can happen if nationalism is ignored. However, the two folkloric works transplanted by Vanka into his Millvale Murals that had previous “lives” point towards a very different interpretation than Nikolić’s. Looking at the original works and their contexts transforms works that some saw as a symbol of (anti-Yugoslav) Croatian nationalism into a work representing an ethnic Croatian identity not at all at odds with Yugoslavism, or in this new environment, with American identity.

When Vanka completed the murals in November 1941, they were widely understood as critical of war. One journalist wrote, “Despite the sweet faces of saints, attention of most observers will be drawn to Mr. Vanka’s pictured sermons against war, sermons that are as full of wrath as the spirit of the Old Testament.”³⁹⁵ However, Vanka’s completed 1941 murals were dedicated on 16 November, just weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 that would drive the United States into the war. America’s entrance into the war just weeks after the Millvale Murals were completed nullified Vanka’s contemplation of the horror of war. This meant that Americans did not want to see images that seemed to communicate an antiwar and pacifist message.

³⁹⁴ “Posebno sam se zadržao pred slikom, koja prikazuje Hrvatsku 1941., razapetu, u mukama. Što je umjetnik s tom slikom želio reći? Da li je to bila proročanski vizija njezinih budućih muka, koje ni do danas nisu prestale?” Nikolić, Vinko. *Pred vratima domovine*. 1966 115.

³⁹⁵ Naylor, “Millvale Church Frescoes Show Anti-War Sentiment.”

5.5 VANKA AND THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA

In 1943 the authorities in the Independent State of Croatia, who were celebrating the second anniversary of their new country, organized a special *Ausstellung kroatischer Kunst* in order to showcase modern Croatian painting and sculpture in the Third Reich.³⁹⁶ Despite war conditions, over 400 works by leading late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Croatian artists were selected and presented in the halls of the Preussische Akademie der Künste in Berlin and the Künstlerhaus in Vienna. Despite their notable violence, the Ustaša did not have the organization or control to carry out cultural goals in the same way that the National Socialist regime did in Germany. This exhibition embodied that through a number of contradictions. The exhibition featured artists who had been condemned for their leftist political orientation, as was the case with Krsto Hegedušić; were already living in exile abroad, including Ivan Meštrović; and those whose works would have been labeled “degenerate” in Nazi Germany because they were so modernist in style, as was the case with both Hegedušić and Meštrović.³⁹⁷ The exhibition even included three of Vanka’s works: *Kroatische Dorfkirche*, *Pieta*, and *Orpheus*. Notably, the catalog essay reinforced the stereotype of the Croatian peasant as the originator and loyal protector of a vibrant and intuitive Croatian art, but the image of the peasant played a relatively small role in the exhibition despite its prominence in Croatian art. The organizers had carefully

³⁹⁶ *Ausstellung kroatischer Kunst*, January-February 1943, Preussische Akademie der Künste, Berlin Unter den Linden 3. This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti. *Ausstellung kroatischer Kunst*, April-May 1943, Künstlerhaus, Vienna. This catalog is available in the Künstlerhaus Archive, Stadt- und Landsarchiv Wien.

³⁹⁷ Just days after Ivan Meštrović and Joza Kljaković were arrested on November 7, 1941 by the Ustaša for supposedly trying to leave the country their work was included in the “First Exhibition of Croatian Artists in the Independent State of Croatia” (“Prva Izložba Hrvatskih Umjetnika u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj”) 9-11 November 1941 in the Umjetnički paviljon. This catalog is available online through the Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti. It would appear again in the next year's iteration 22 November – 13 December 1942. No such exhibition was held in 1943. Organized by Ivo Šrepel, curator at the Galerija umjetnosti nezavisne države hrvatske u Zagrebu (the former Moderna galerija) although a government appointed committee chose the works.

selected works by Croatia's most established and internationally-recognized academic and naive painters, regardless of their relationship to the regime, while leaving out popular artists and images dealing with Croatian folk culture. Perhaps, folk imagery had to be avoided because of its enduring association with both the Habsburg Monarchy and the Croatian Peasant Party's movement for peasant rights in the interwar period. Instead the Ustaša regime tried to trace the development of a modern and distinctly Croatian art. The goal of the exhibition was to provide a legitimizing cultural history for the young fascist state without making it appear provincial.

During the course of World War II, Adamic published several articles on the events in Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the war he wrote in support of Draža Mihailović's Četniks, who were loyal to the Serbian monarchy in exile. However by 1942 he was trying to convince Americans to throw their support behind Josip Broz Tito's Partisans, who he argued had the best chance to unite and defend the Yugoslav regions.³⁹⁸ He, as well as most Croatians and Slovenians, would become a staunch supporter of the Yugoslav People's Front led by Tito and wanted a united but federated Yugoslavia after the war. It seems Vanka was in agreement with Adamic at the end of the war. An article published in 1945 in *Narodni List* quoted Vanka as saying the new Federation of Yugoslavia would bring "freedom and a better future" and condemning those artists who had supported fascism.³⁹⁹ Eventually Vanka and Adamic would fall out of regular contact and it is unclear if their opinions about path of postwar Yugoslavia split. Vanka would himself never return to postwar Socialist Yugoslavia. However, the fact that

³⁹⁸ Louis Adamic first wrote negatively of Draža Mihailović and his chetniks, who were still loyal to the Serbian monarch, in "Mikhailovitch: Balkan Mystery Man," *Saturday Evening Post*, 19 December 1942.

³⁹⁹ The article is laced with propagandistic language, which may mean it is not Vanka's exact words. Milena Gaćinović, "Iz života naših zemljaka u Americi: naš proslavljeni slikar Maksimilijan Vanka, Pozdravlja Maršala Tita i Novu demokratsku Federativnu Jugoslaviju," *Narodni List*, 20 November 1945.

Margaret Stetten Vanka donated a large group of works to the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Art in the late 1960s after his death means there was not a complete break with the country.

5.6 MODERNITY ON THE EDGE

Vanka's 1937 Millvale Murals grappled with some of the most pressing issues of the late 1930s: the immigrant experience and labor politics. In his 1941 murals, his depictions of folk culture criticize the rise of fascism in Croatia. Vanka distinctly intended these murals for new Americans, not for reactionary Croatian nationalists.

This project has sought to understand the original context in which images of Croatian folk culture were made, even as they are transformed, especially in present-day Croatia, into powerful nationalist tools for legitimizing a fairly young nation-state. Through a close examination of Vanka's body of folkloric works produced over the period spanning from 1913 to 1941, it is apparent that the Croatian peasant was used to imagine a variety of competing Central European identities over the period over the course of the interwar period. In museums of applied arts, Croatian folk culture was incorporated into the image of the strong multi-ethnic empire at the end of the Habsburg Monarchy. The image of the suffering Croatian peasant in Vanka's *Our Mothers* was used to make an argument for Yugoslavism at the end of World War I. Images of proud, strong Croatian peasants supported the Croatian Peasant Party's fight for political autonomy in the late 1920s. Finally, reimagined in the new context of the United States, Croatian peasants helped immigrants in Millvale's St. Nicholas church envision their new American identity as intertwined with their Croatian heritage. In these instances—which comprise just a few of the many identities envisioned with the aid of Croatian folk culture—personal Croatian

ethnic identity coexisted within and alongside larger multi-national identities. It was possible to be both Croatian and part of other imagined communities. That is in stark contrast to the exclusive Croatian nationalism that emerges in the second half of the twentieth century.

Each of these various identities to which Vanka harnessed his folkloric works presented a different solution to the “Croatian question.” Each in turn offered the possibility of expanded political autonomy for the people within the Croatian regions in new political configurations. Despite Vanka’s evolving allegiances and chameleonic mastery of styles, he remained at his core the same over the interwar period: a cosmopolitan dedicated to elevating the social and political status of rural Croatian peasants. Though for many throughout the twentieth century the Croatian peasant was a vexed figure intrinsic to, antithetical to, and victim to modernity, for Vanka the inhabitants of rural Croatia represented a living, changing culture. They established their traditions in the past, they continued to be a part of the present, and it was vital to improve their situation so they could continue their culture in the future.

Each of the chapters highlighted a facet of alternate experiences of modernity in the Yugoslav regions. Though the region lacked the traditional markers of modernity—namely industry—this was offset by the presence of modern museums, by the sale of modern print and film technology, and by the awareness of modernist art movements. All of these disseminated modern political ideas, modern social changes, and modern artistic styles. Yet, although they appeared on the surface to imitate Western modernity, this project has revealed how these museums, magazines, and art transformed the visual markers of Western modernity to serve distinctly local concerns and context. Thus existing paradoxically alongside these visualizations of modernization were images of the continued strong presence of folk culture. The result was the envision of competing identities through folk culture in these lands with little political power,

not—at least initially—as a reactionary force but rather as a way of working toward a modernity that was visible but out of reach.

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